

CHECHNYA AND THE YELTSIN SYNDROME February 5 -18, 1996

IN THESE TIMES

THE GRAND INQUISITORS

The
politics
behind
the GOP
tribunals

Joel
Bleifuss
reports



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E D I T O R I A L

AND NOW, ONCE AGAIN, THE FLAT-TAX SHELL GAME

It's election year, and the flat tax has been trotted out again. Why? you may wonder, since the chance of any form of flat tax being enacted is slim to none. One explanation may be that the flat tax—as opposed to the graduated income tax—sounds good in soundbites, and the pros know that the vast majority of voters will never get beyond that point. Thus, some adherents, such as Republican presidential hopeful Steve Forbes, assert that a flat tax is the fairest of them all. And the GOP's privately appointed Kemp commission, which threw its flat-tax proposal into the pot in mid-January, emphasizes that simplicity is the idea's main virtue.

The current tax code, says commission head Jack Kemp, is a bewildering monstrosity that not only encourages cynicism, anger and cheating, but also distorts economic decisions and reduces our standard of living. His commission's proposal, on the other hand, claims to eliminate all the special-interest loopholes and would require only a postcard that anyone could fill out.

Forbes' proposal seeks to enhance the wealth of the super-rich at the expense of working people—those who have little or no income beyond their wages or salaries. Forbes would exempt from taxation all unearned income—money derived from stock dividends, interest on bonds, mortgages or other loans, or profits from partnerships. This proposal created a field day for Pat Buchanan, Forbes' main rival for second place in the Republican presidential primary race. Under the Forbes plan, Buchanan explained, Bill Gates—if he were to retire—would never again pay a penny in taxes on the income from his personal

People are angry about our tax system, especially because of proliferating local and state taxes. The flat tax would only make things worse.

fortune of \$12 billion, but the men and women who work at Microsoft would have to pay 17 percent.

In response, Forbes noted that corporate income would also be taxed at 17 percent, and to tax his dividends would amount to double taxation. On the surface, Forbes' rejoinder makes some sense, though few voters will ever get this far into the argument. But what Forbes doesn't say is that taxes on corporate profits are mostly passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices, and that the higher one's income, the smaller the proportion that

is spent on consumption. So, in effect, Forbes' corporate tax is double taxation for those who use all their income on living expenses—working people, in other words.

Unlike Forbes' plan, Kemp's mainstream Republican version of the flat tax, endorsed by Newt Gingrich and Bob Dole, would tax income from any source. And, again unlike Forbes' plan, it would also allow homeowners deductions for mortgage interest and property taxes, as well as deductions for charitable contributions.

Still, when pressed, all the flat-taxers admit that their plans would reduce taxes for the wealthy more than for working people. But they justify them with the theory—known as supply-side economics—that lower rates for the wealthy would provide more money for investment. Indeed, Kemp insists that lowering rates for the wealthy would double the rate of economic growth, lead to lower interest rates and thus create more jobs and increase government revenue.

He may even believe this, but thinking won't make it so. Reagan rationalized his tax cuts of the early '80s with this theory, but the result was the most rapid growth in federal deficits in the history of our nation. And the reason for this is obvious: Investment follows the opportunity to make a profit, not the supply of money available. Giving the super-rich many billions of dollars more than they already have would only further distort our society and exacerbate the insecurity and anger that working people now experience.

Of course, we do need tax reform. People are angry about our present system of taxation, not only on the federal level, but also because of steadily rising sales and transaction taxes, as well as the property taxes that burden both homeowners and renters. As the wealthy pay a smaller share of taxes and as loopholes abound for a myriad of special corporate interests, cities and states are increasingly unable to provide decent health care, affordable housing, acceptable public education and adequate mass transit—to mention only some of the traditional services one expects from city and state government.

Instead of facing these needs and taxing those who benefit most from government subsidies and protections, the Republicans present us with the smoke and mirrors of the flat tax. That alone provides grounds for voting them out of Congress.

IN THESE TIMES

"...with liberty and justice for all"

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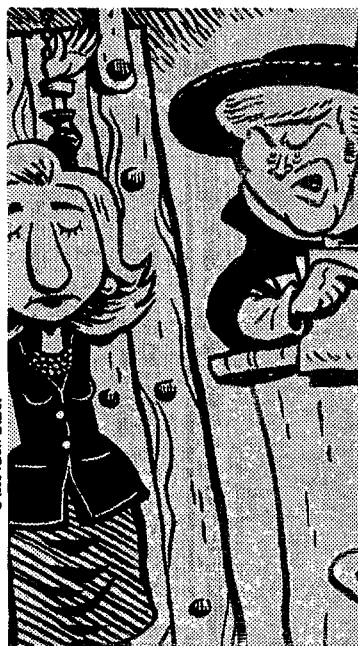
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LETTERS

Enquiring mindset

You mislead readers when you leave them with the impression that neither Bill Gates nor Microsoft give money to charities ("Appall-O-Meter," January 8). Gates has personally given millions to the University of Washington and many other organizations, both locally in the Pacific Northwest and worldwide. He plans to give the vast majority of his wealth late in his life, à la Andrew Carnegie, but it is not accurate to say he "doesn't donate" currently. Microsoft is in fact a relatively progressive employer when it comes to donations: I've personally contributed money to Planned Parenthood, Cispes, Oxfam, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, etc. etc., and Microsoft has matched my contributions dollar for dollar. You may argue that it's morally wrong that figures like Gates have as much money as they do, and critique a system that leads to such inequality. That would

be a worthwhile discussion. But to say "Bill is a scrooge" oversimplifies the issue, and leaves your readers with still more Bill Gates myth instead of fact. Let's leave fictionalization to the *National Enquirer*, and keep it out of *In These Times*.

You again mislead readers in your article on Linux software ("Shareware," January 8) when you suggest that programs created by grad students in their free time are viable alternatives to professionally created software. It takes thousands of pros working our butts off and tremendous resources to make software on the level of Windows 95. Would you join Mao in encouraging Chinese peasants to make steel in their back yards as a route toward industrialization? Would you tell people who need transportation to get together with their buddies and build an airliner? What we need is an intelligent discussion of how to bring economic democracy to a high-tech economy in which large concentrations

of capital and expertise are a necessary part of the production process. I'm not saying that the status quo is healthy—it's not. But to suggest that complex production processes are simply unnecessary to preserve current quality standards is very misleading, and ignores more valuable discussions.

Matt Loschen
Redmond, Wash

Bottom up

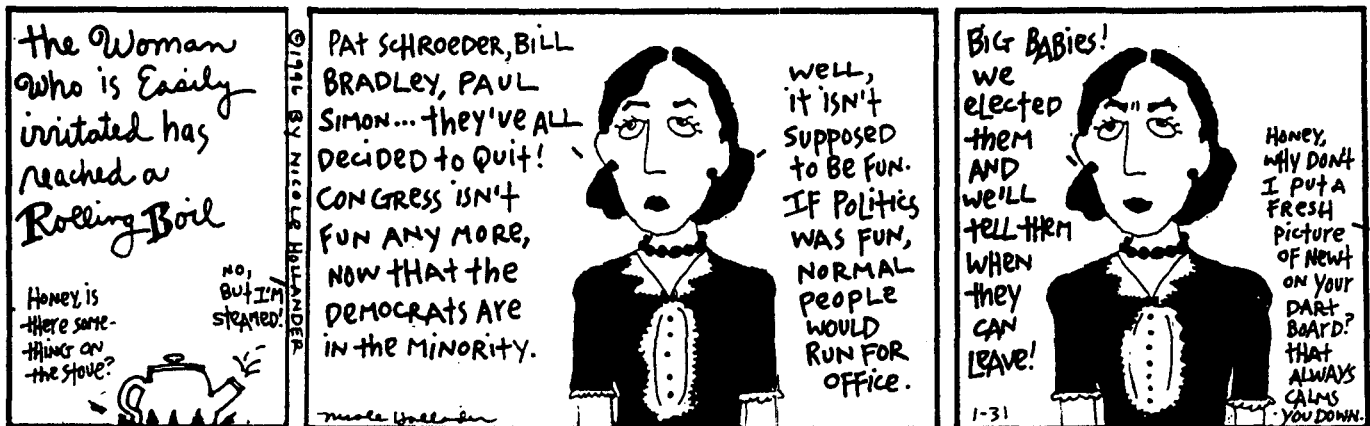
The letter signed by 43 liberal intellectuals ("Letters," December 25) misrepresents the record of John Sweeney, former president of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and now president of the AFL-CIO. It also provides an inadequate analysis of what is required for "the rebirth of a strong and progressive labor movement."

The letter states in part: "The commitment demonstrated by newly elected president John J. Sweeney and his energetic associates promises to once again make the house of labor a social movement around which we can rally." But credible left publications and persons in whom I have confidence allege that:

- Sweeney never worked a day in the low-paid service jobs held by most SEIU members. After moving from president of SEIU Local 32B to SEIU president, Sweeney "double-dipped" by receiving both his presidential salary of more than \$200,000 and continuing payments of many thousands of dollars a year from Local 32B.

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander



• The national SEIU convention endorsed single-payer health care, but after the 1992 election Sweeney became point man for the AFL-CIO's support of the Clintons' managed competition health insurance proposal.

• When teachers struck the Los Angeles public schools in 1989, Sweeney and SEIU Local 99 Secretary-Treasurer Walter Backstrom ordered school bus drivers to scab. When several drivers honored the picket lines, SEIU joined with the school board in threatening them with discharge.

• In June 1995, an opposition slate calling itself the "Multiracial Alliance" defeated almost all the incumbents in SEIU Local 399, a 25,000-member Los Angeles-based local of janitors and health care workers with a Latino majority. Sweeney's response as SEIU president was to put Local 399 in trusteeship.

These claims are consistent with my personal experience as a lawyer for members of SEIU Local 627 in Youngstown, Ohio. My clients have included militant members fired when the SEIU organizer left town right after an NLRB election and two Local 627 organizers discharged for trying to start a staff union. One of the District 1199 organizations affiliated with SEIU is also organizing in Youngstown. It is a "local union" that includes three states (Ohio, Kentucky and West Virginia). All dues money goes to Columbus, and grievances are handled perfunctorily by an overburdened staff representative.

Apart from their romanticization of Sweeney and SEIU, signers of the "house of labor" letter set forth a superficial analysis of what is needed to revitalize the labor movement. The letter "applaud[s]" the decision to dramatically increase the resources the union federation devotes to the organization of new workers." But "organization" in and of itself is a gift horse that needs careful dental inspection. Most union organizing in recent years—and all SEIU organizing with which I am familiar—has been so-called blitz organizing. Fearful of the resources that an antiunion employer

can bring to bear, the union organizer sets in motion a whirlwind of card-signing. Although an "in-house committee" may be convened to do leg work, all decisions are made by the organizer, in consultation with union lawyers. If the NLRB election is successful, the same top-down pattern continues in servicing the new unit and bargaining for contracts. Standardized contracts are imposed that don't deal with local issues as perceived by members. This kind of organizing produces dues for regional and international union offices—but not necessarily much else. It is the very opposite of the bottom-up, person-by-person organizing of, for example, clerical workers at Yale University in the 1980s.

More regrettable is the signers' implicit endorsement of the strategy of bringing about social change by electing new top leaders. President Clinton has encouraged the very downsizing and disenfranchising of workers "by a corporate elite that has lost all sense of social responsibility" that the letter writers correctly protest. Yet Sweeney said on *Meet the Press* that "President Clinton has done a great job as president." How in the world can the signers of the letter consider Sweeney's elevation "the most heartening development in our nation's political life since the heyday of the civil rights movement"?

Staughton Lynd
Niles, Ohio

Back to the womb

How shall we explain "the murder of a pregnant woman by a sterile couple who wanted her baby"? In *These Times* ("Editorial," January 8) explains this *entirely* as one of a number of "byproducts of American corporate capitalism, ... pervasive corporate culture ... [and] acquisitive individualism." There is *not even a mention* of natalism or family values, the cultural context of the current passion for having babies. *ITT* bends itself into a Marxoid/economoid pretzel to explain things that are much more easily explained by those who have some acquaintance with feminism.

Together with Virginia Blaisdell, we discussed some of these things in our much-reviled *The Godfathers: Freudians, Marxists and the Scientific and Political Protection Societies* (New Haven, 1975). It saddens us that *ITT* still doesn't get it.

Jesse Lemisch
Naomi Weisstein
New York City

Editor's note: We did not attempt a full explanation of the baby-snatching murder. We merely suggested that the corporate culture that puts the bottom line above all else and that glorifies acquisitive individualism had more to do with this atrocity than did the welfare system, which Newt Gingrich implied was the culprit. Natalism and the passion for having babies have been around for a long time, but no one we know of has ever seen it as a motive for a murder of this kind. Nor does our acquaintance with feminism help us understand how a woman would murder another woman so she could take her unborn child.

Consuming passion

Joel Bleifuss' December 25 article, "House of Cards," blames credit card companies for the large personal debt carried by American consumers. But why aren't progressives willing to shift some of that blame onto the consumers themselves? Where are progressives when it comes to promoting frugality and voluntary simplicity?

Let's not kid ourselves—we can continue the pointless game of playing victim of a top-down corporate system, or we can take responsibility for our consumer addictions, modify our appetites and make progress toward significantly altering our lifestyle.

Common sense dictates that progressives adopt the latter path, but the left doesn't have a track record of using common sense. When they tire of marinating in their own negativity, the voluntary simplicity movement will gladly accept them.

Bob Smet
Springfield, Ill.

InSHORT



CONSTANT COMPANIONS

How serious is the Clinton administration's pledge to restore democracy and the rule of law to Haiti? For a clue, consider the administration's conduct after purloining key Haitian documents. Sometime after the multinational peacekeeping force landed in Haiti in October 1994, U.S. troops seized 100,000 pages of documents from Haitian military headquarters in Port-au-Prince and an additional 60,000 pages from FRAPH, the paramilitary group headed by former CIA employee Emmanuel Constant.

Although the exact contents of the documents are undetermined, Haitian officials believe they contain vital information about the Haitian military apparatus and the coup regime of Lt. Gen. Raoul Cédras, including names of individuals responsible for past human

rights abuses. Also taken, according to Ira Kurzban, a Miami-based attorney who represents the Haitian government in the United States, were videotapes of FRAPH meetings and "trophy photos" of FRAPH members standing alongside corpses. Other documents may also help clarify the role played by the United States in the 1991 coup led by Cédras. "I think if all the documents were returned," says Kurzban,

they "would show far more [U.S.] links not only with FRAPH but with the Haitian army."

For more than a year, the Haitian government has been asking that these documents be returned, not least because they are likely to play an important role in its case against Constant. "The Haitian government is working night and day to see to this case," says James Rosefort, a spokesman for the Haitian Justice Ministry. The FRAPH leader, who fled to the United States last year, has just dropped all appeals to a deportation order, clearing the way for his return to Haiti. Kurzban speculates that Constant has agreed not to contest his deportation because he knows the potentially incriminating material remains under wraps in Washington.

Haitian prosecutors aren't the only ones who have been stonewalled. Lawyers at the U.S. Center for Constitutional Rights have been seeking a separate copy of the documents in connection with a civil suit they are bringing in a U.S. court against FRAPH. Their client, Alerte Balance, an Aristide supporter, alleges she was kidnapped and tortured by FRAPH members in 1993. So far, U.S. officials have failed to turn over the documents, forcing Balance's lawyers to ask the presiding judge to withhold a decision on the case until they do so.

By withholding the documents, the U.S. government is not only obstruct-

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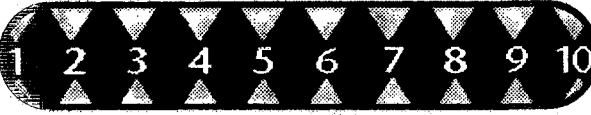
Somewhere under the Rainbow

ON CAPITOL HILL, NEWLY ELECTED REP. JESSE JACKSON JR. (D-IL) MOVED QUICKLY TO ALLEVIATE concerns that he would be a mere tool of his famous father. Unfortunately, Jesse Jr. proved his independence by taking a position far to the right of the elder Jackson. In his first House vote, Jackson joined Republicans in overriding President Clinton's veto of legislation that shields accountants and corporations from lawsuits in securities fraud cases. The National Rainbow Coalition—which Jesse Sr. heads and Jesse Jr. had worked for as field director—had urged Congress to kill the measure.

In denouncing a similar 1994 bill, Jesse Jackson Sr. charged that "through this measure, corporations, banks, accounting firms and other large, powerful institutions are trying to shut the courthouse door completely to ordinary victims of fraud." Apparently, Rep. Jackson never sought his father's counsel. According to unnamed sources quoted in the Washington-based *Corporate Crime Reporter*, fellow Illinois Congressman and former Black Panther Bobby Rush told Jackson not "to offend big business on your first vote." —Jim McNeill

APPALL-O-METER

THE IN THESE TIMES INDEX OF INDECENCIES



Lone star nuts 8.5

A hundred angry Texans rallied on the Capitol steps in Austin recently, demanding that their country stand up to a vicious foreign invader—the United States of America. “Legally, we never ceded the soil of the Republic of Texas to any foreign nation,” Richard



L. McLaren, the chief ambassador and consul general of the Texas Republic, told the press: As the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* reported, the budding historical revisionists were especially peeved that Texas Gov. George W. Bush had refused to hand the reins of power over to them. “What a sad statement that is,” complained John C. VanKirk, President of Texas, “an alleged elected official

who is determined to operate a government in outlawry.”

Liar, liar 4.4

Formerly balding newspaper columnist Bob Greene may have come to feminism late, but he’s doing his best to master its complexities. Greene still may need a little more practice, though. In a column castigating Bill Clinton for threatening to pop William Safire on the nose, he suggested that Safire had in fact shown the First Lady all due respect. “By calling her a congenital liar,” Greene wrote, “he was in a peculiar but undeniable aspect treating her with deep seriousness, giving her weight he felt she deserved.”

Ruby slippage 5.3

Clearly inspired by decades of conspiracy-mongering about the Kennedy assassination, Earl Ruby is now suggesting that his brother Jack wasn’t really responsible for Lee Harvey Oswald’s death. Sure, Jack Ruby shot the

nutty loner at point-blank range, but the real villains, in Earl Ruby’s mind, were Dallas paramedics. “After my brother shot him, there was a lot of commotion, with the media there and everything,” *Esquire* reports Ruby as saying. “I was told they didn’t know the nature of his injury, and when they got him into the ambulance, they were trying to make him breathe again, which would have made it worse.”

None too swift 6.7

Asked if the motto on the exterior of the New York General Post Office still reflected company policy, Postal Service Vice President for New York operations John Kelly indignantly replied that it never had been policy, the *New York Observer* reports. “It’s bull,” Kelly said. “Some guy put that up there when they built that building. It had nothing to do with us.” The motto in question? You may know it by heart: “Neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.” Must have been some other couriers they were talking about.

the CIA or Defense Intelligence Agency, but also the likes of Constant and other Haitians who acted as their agents and paid informants.

There is little doubt among many Haitians that U.S. forces have long been complicit with the country’s brutal paramilitaries. Lawyers for the Haitian government recently submitted a document to the United Nations charging that American troops have obstructed efforts to disarm reputed thugs and human rights abusers by slowing down weapons searches and even tipping off targets of impending raids. The document seizure is adding insult to injury. “We’re setting a terrible precedent,” says Scott Armstrong, an ex-*Washington Post* reporter and co-founder of the National Security Archive. “[We’re] editing Haiti’s history.”

—Eyal Press

FOOD OR THOUGHT

“I’d like to write a parable,” says Hunter College professor Ken Sherrill, “about an obsessive-compulsive governor who’s driven to root out redundancy of any kind. He encounters the phrase ‘food for thought’ and says, ‘There are two words here that begin with ‘f’—that’s waste! It should be ‘food or thought.’”

Unfortunately, Professor Sherrill’s little parable is not far from reality in New York state. The neurotic politician in question is Gov. George Pataki, and if the state legislature passes his proposed budget, New York City’s celebrated system of public higher education is unlikely to survive in anything like its present form. Not only does the City University of New York (CUNY)—of which Hunter is part—face draconian budget cuts of \$90 to \$100 million, but the governor proposes to rewrite financial aid rules so that many poor students will literally face a choice between food or thought.

Since 1976, when CUNY first began charging tuition, the state’s Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) has

ing justice; it may also be breaking the law. On December 12, the American Law Division of the Congressional Research Service issued a report stating that “under international law as interpreted by the U.S. government,” the documents have “belonged all along to the Haitian state, and their retention by the U.S. government violates Haiti’s ownership rights.” Retaining documents, the report adds, may also violate the terms of the December 1994

agreement outlining the multinational mission in Haiti, which called for all member nations “to respect fully the principles and spirit of the general conventions and all other international law.”

The Pentagon maintains that it will eventually return the documents to Haiti, but only after it has blacked out certain names to “ensure the safety of Americans.” This will likely include not only U.S. officials who worked for

upheld the university's founding principle—that no New Yorker be denied an education due to lack of income. For the poorest students, TAP grants cover the full tuition at any state institution. Some 92,000 CUNY students also receive federal Pell grants, which are intended to pay for books, lab fees and other college-related expenses. In addition, many poor students receive money through the state's Home Relief welfare program. To Pataki, this looks like outrageous redundancy. "A student going to public university on Home Relief could make \$1,000 a year without going to a single class," he fumed in his budget message last month.

Of course, neither Pataki nor anyone else has produced evidence that any student has enrolled at CUNY in order to score illicit funding. Nevertheless, the governor's budget would severely restrict TAP funding for lower-income students: Pataki would deduct half the value of any Pell grant a student receives and the full value of any Home Relief assistance from that student's TAP package. In effect, Pataki is telling students who fall into financial difficulties that they cannot

receive Home Relief *unless* they drop out of school. Factor in a 10 percent across-the-board cut in TAP at public universities, and the result is a projected 10 percent drop in next year's CUNY enrollment.

Despite talk of a looming "budget gap," it's clear that the governor's attack on public universities has little to do with balancing the state's budget. In fact, the budget would already be balanced were it not for the last two years' tax cuts; according to a report issued by the Pataki administration itself, this year's \$3.9 billion shortfall is almost exactly equivalent to the \$3.8 billion those tax cuts have cost the state in annual revenue. And then there are the extra, sadistic elements in the governor's plans for CUNY that save no money at all—like requiring city university students who receive welfare to do 26 hours a week of "workfare," cleaning out gutters and picking up garbage. Logically, one might suppose that college students would be one group whose right to state assistance would be uncontested; after all, a college education greatly increases their chances of supporting themselves in the future. Caving in

to the anti-welfare onslaught, the CUNY administration accepted the principle of workfare but begged that their students at least be allowed to meet their requirement with jobs around the CUNY campuses, which are in desperate need of maintenance. Nothing doing, came the reply.

To the deep thinkers at the Manhattan Institute, the conservative think tank where many Pataki schemes have been incubated, the real problem isn't the budget; rather, they say, it's that too many students are attending college, and specifically, too many of *them*. "CUNY has a very radical affirmative action program for unqualified minority students," says the institute's Heather McDonald. "College is a privilege; if cuts mean these unqualified students are no longer able to go to college, that would be a good thing."

Last year, when Pataki tried to eviscerate public higher education, massive protests by CUNY students and middle-class furor over tuition hikes succeeded in limiting the damage. This year, a backlash may again emerge as people become aware of the extent of the cuts. State legislators won't vote on the budget until March at the earliest; and that leaves time for a

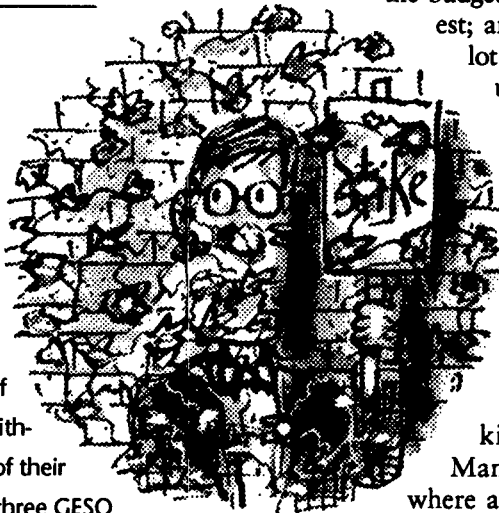
lot of lobbying. CUNY faculty have formed a political action committee and are planning a massive campaign of advocacy and education. Should they fail, however, New Yorkers will find themselves one step closer to the Empire State envisioned by Gov. Pataki and his friends at the

Manhattan Institute: a land where a liberal arts education is reserved for the privileged, where working-class children receive vocational training when they're not simply set to sweeping the streets, and where "access and excellence"—the motto of CUNY—is a contradiction in terms.

—J.W. Mason

Union-busting 101

USING TIME-HONORED STRIKEBREAKING TACTICS, Yale University brought a group of unruly graduate students to heel last month. (See "Storming the Ivory Tower," December 11.) On January 15, the Graduate Employees and Students Organization (GESO), which is seeking recognition from Yale as a collective bargaining agent for the university's graduate teaching assistants, called off a five-week grade strike. Since the end of the fall semester, more than 200 GESO members had withheld their students' grades pending official recognition of their organization. Yale administrators retaliated by bringing three GESO leaders before a disciplinary committee and, GESO alleges, by threatening to dismiss some strikers from teaching positions and to blackball others professionally. The three GESO leaders were later "pardoned," but five striking "part-time acting instructors"—graduate students who teach their own courses—have lost their posts for the spring semester. GESO has filed an unfair labor practices complaint against the university with the National Labor Relations Board in Hartford, Conn. —Dave Mulcahey



MEDIA WATCH

BY JENNIFER GONNERMAN

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Spouse in the house

Already bored with the GOP's less than scintillating presidential contenders, reporters are turning to the wives of the Republican candidates to keep their coverage interesting. And now that the political press is pummeling First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton over Whitewater and Travelgate, similar bare-knuckles coverage of the would-be First Ladies seems certain to come.

Two weeks ago, the *New Yorker* dedicated nine pages to resurrecting charges against Elizabeth Hanford Dole that first surfaced during the 1988 presidential race. At the center of the controversy are charges by David Owen, a former political intimate of Kansas Sen. Bob Dole, that Mrs. Dole benefited financially from her husband's political clout during the '80s.

Questions have also been raised about Lamar Alexander's wife, Honey, and whether she profited financially from her husband's position when he was governor of Tennessee. In the early '80s, Honey saw her \$8,900 investment in the Corrections Corp. of America grow by more than \$130,000 after her husband pushed for the company to take over the state prison system.

Attacks on the would-be First Ladies have not been limited to finances. Just as critics have pilloried Hillary Clinton as a liberal influence on her husband, ultraconservative Republicans have started attacking the GOP wives in an apparent attempt to draw the presidential hopefuls further to the right. The *American Spectator* recently reported

that "conservatives with long memories are circulating stories about Elizabeth Dole's support for feminist-backed comparable worth [pay] schemes when she served in the Reagan administration ... and about her more successful glass-ceiling initiative as secretary of labor in the Bush administration."

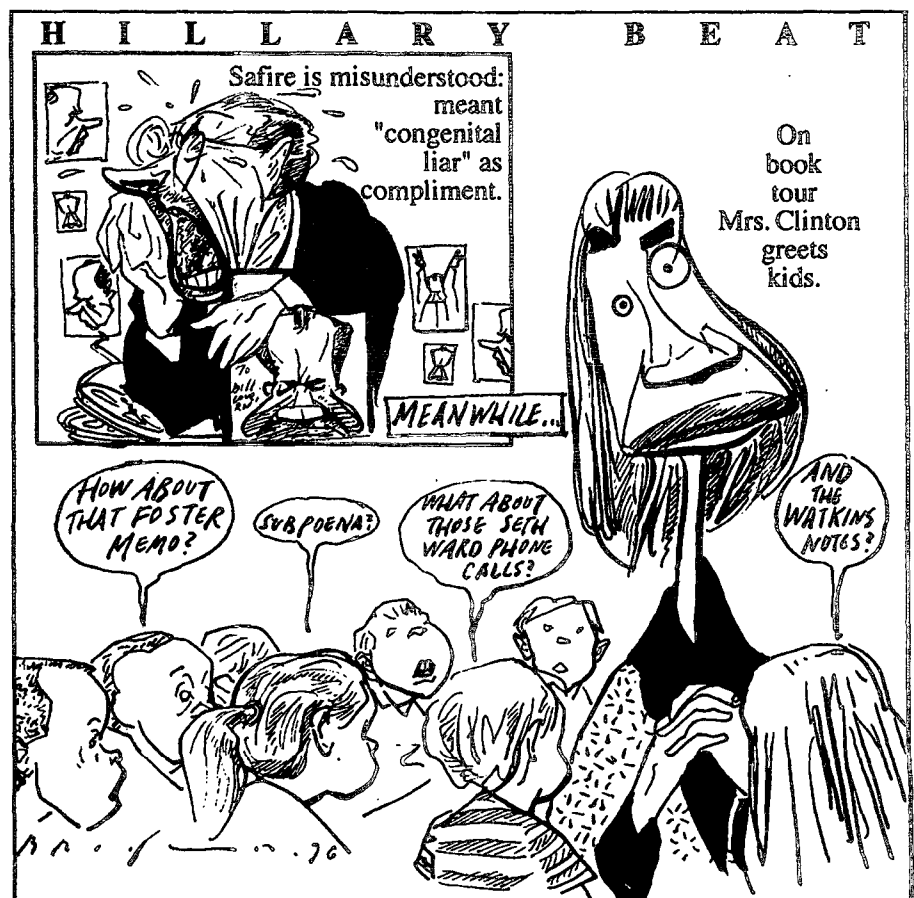
In November, the *Tennessean* and the *Orlando Sentinel* reported a rumor—allegedly circulated by Sen. Phil Gramm's campaign—that Honey was once a national leader of Planned Parenthood, the favorite target of the pro-life movement. It turns out, however, that Honey was never a "national leader"; she just volunteered for the group in the early '70s.

For perhaps the first time ever, ex-wives have also figured prominently in this year's campaign coverage. With two divorcees near the front of the field, reporters have been busy hunting down former spouses. For its most recent issue, *Mirabella* managed to land interviews with the ex-wives of both Bob Dole and Phil Gramm. Though neither woman aired much dirty laundry, Sharon Horn, who was married to Gramm during the 1960s, offered more evidence of the Texas senator's relentless ambition. Horn says Gramm couldn't even wait until their second date to announce his presidential ambitions. Likewise, the former Mrs. Dole confirmed accounts of her ex-husband's legendary lack of warmth. "Bob," says Phyllis Macey, "wasn't a hugger and a toucher."



TOMORROW'S NEWS TONIGHT

By Steve Brodner



DOWN IS OUT

By now, it's become a perverse American ritual. A major U.S. company announces massive job cuts, and its stock surges. Early last month, the AT&T Corp. followed the script to a tee, when it unveiled plans to cut 40,000 workers; Wall Street responded by pumping up AT&T's stock more than \$2.50 a share.

The move seemed to offer further confirmation of the conventional business wisdom that companies today must downsize in order to become more productive and profitable. In fact, ongoing research suggests that such wisdom may be seriously flawed.

Researchers drawing on Census Bureau economic surveys are finding that, at least among manufacturers, successful upsizing is spurring just as much productivity growth as successful downsizing. "In many cases, downsizing is not a sign of success, it's a sign of failure," says John Haltiwanger, a research associate at the Census Bureau's Center for Economic Studies and a professor of economics at the University of Maryland.

Haltiwanger's latest research appears in a July 1995 working paper he co-authored with Federal Reserve Senior Economist Eric Bartelsman and Martin Neil Baily of the Council of Economic Advisors. Using Census Bureau surveys of 350,000 manufacturing sites, Haltiwanger et al. have gauged the performance of firms between 1979 and 1989. What they've learned may disappoint business theorists pressing for an ever leaner approach to production.

Even in steel manufacturing, the industry in which downsizing proved most effective, more than 40 percent of productivity growth came in plants that upsized. "You really can't general-

NAFTA's unclean bill of health

EVER SINCE THE FOREIGN-OWNED FACTORIES KNOWN AS MAQUILADORAS began sprouting along the U.S.-Mexico border, health officials in both countries have noted a disturbing rise in certain birth defects. During the debate over the North American Free Trade Agreement, even the treaty's defenders acknowledged the health problems afflicting many border towns. "I've seen the babies born with birth defects," admitted then-Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen while promoting NAFTA in 1993. Bentsen insisted, however, that "the NAFTA package gives us the ability to assure that [those problems] will be addressed."

But a new report from Public Citizen, the Washington-based research group, suggests that the 1994 treaty may be exacerbating health and environmental problems along the border. The report, *NAFTA's Broken Promises*, notes that the Clinton administration had predicted that the number of border-straddling maquiladoras—along with their harmful pollutants—would decline once the treaty was implemented. In fact, maquiladora concentration along the border has grown since NAFTA's passage—and so have possibly related health effects. In Cameron County, Texas, located across the border from the maquiladoras of Matamoros, Mexico, health officials in 1993 reported 11 cases of anencephaly, a rare birth defect in which babies are born with deformed or missing brains. In 1994, the number of cases rose to 15. With other diseases and deformities showing few signs of declining, Public Citizen concludes that "NAFTA provides lopsided protections for investment rights, while sublimating the North American peoples' environmental, health [and democratic] rights." —James Joseph

ize by industry, by size, by any broad factor to determine which plants will benefit from downsizing," says Haltiwanger. Consequently, stock market players looking for particular industries or companies likely to benefit from downsizing will be frustrated by the trio's research.

"There's a tendency for economists to look at broad aggregates and to draw inferences," notes Haltiwanger. But his July paper, titled "Labor Productivity: Structural and Cyclical Dynamics," suggests that grand theories about the inexorable logic of downsizing may amount to grand illusions. Haltiwanger doesn't deny that downsizing has been effective for some firms, but it is no panacea.

"Even when the downsizing is ultimately successful," Haltiwanger says, "it's not unusual to see a year or two of declining productivity. In many of these firms, productivity goes down

dramatically in the first years following the downsizing."

Perhaps someone should have warned those AT&T investors.

—Jim McNeill

LAND FOR PEACE?

As a scion of one of Guatemala's wealthiest families, Alvaro Arzú Irigoyen seems better suited to be a plutocrat than a peacemaker. But his recent inauguration as Guatemala's president is expected to resuscitate the moribund negotiations aimed at ending the country's 35-year civil war.

Arzú took office on January 14, declaring negotiation of a final peace accord with guerrilla forces his administration's top priority. The 49-year-old leader of the conservative National Advancement Party (PAN), which he founded in 1990, vowed that he would



not capitulate to "pressure groups that traditionally have used their power to obtain or preserve privileges contrary to the common good," and instead would seek an agreement in "the national interest."

The first interest group that Arzú may be forced to stand up to is the one most responsible for putting him in office: the business elite concentrated in Guatemala City. In the January 7 presidential runoff, which drew only 36 percent of all eligible voters to the polls, Arzú's 2 percent margin of victory nationwide was provided by voters in the nation's capital, who, led by the city's elite, favored their former mayor by a 2-1 margin. Arzú narrowly defeated Alfonso Portillo Cabrera of the Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG), the surrogate candidate for former dictator Efraín Ríos Montt, who was ruled ineligible because of his role in the 1982 coup that brought him to power.

Arzú will have to deal delicately with Guatemala's powerful oligarchy since the peace talks are currently stalled over land redistribution proposals and other socioeconomic issues affecting their interests. Early indications, according to observers, are that Arzú is prepared to stand by his promise to resist pressure from hard-liners within both the elite and the nation's military.

Rachel Garst, who monitors Guatemala for the Washington Office on Latin America, says the new president's appointment of "progressive individuals" to several key cabinet posts should "counteract fears that Arzú is automatically going to defend the interests of the economic elite." The appointment of Gen. Julio Balconi Turcios as minister of defense is hailed as a "positive sign" by Francisco Ortega of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), the coalition of the country's rebel forces. According to Ortega, Balconi earned the URNG's respect at the negotiating table because of his honesty and commitment to the peace process. (Before breaking down last month, talks had produced accords addressing human

rights, the rights of indigenous people and other issues.)

Guerrilla leaders are confident, Ortega says, that a significant element of the country's wealthy citizens is "ready to give up some privileges" in order to bring an end to a war that has claimed approximately 150,000 lives. Ortega believes Arzú's privileged background will help him convince the nation's business owners and industrialists that the country's current distribution of land—under which 2 percent of the people control 80 percent of all arable land—is a destabilizing factor that undermines their long-term interests. By forging a coalition of commercial interests, the URNG hopes Arzú can overcome hard-line agricultural interests that oppose any discussion of land reform.

While Ortega and others are confident about Arzú's ability to produce results at the negotiating table, they

remain concerned that a final peace accord could come at a high cost: The new president could be forced to abandon desperately needed tax reforms in exchange for the oligarchy's acquiescence on land reform. Observers are also skeptical about Arzú's ability to fully implement whatever accord is reached. PAN won a congressional majority in November's legislative elections and so should be able to approve any peace settlement. But the party's majority falls short of the threshold needed to enact any constitutional amendments required by the agreement, creating the possibility of a legislative showdown with Ríos Montt and the FRG.

"Whether Arzú will finally be able to bring peace to Guatemala remains to be seen," says Alice Zachmann, director of the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission/USA. "All we can do is hope."

—Peter Zirnite

THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH

By Peter Hannan



THE FIRST STONE

THE GRAND INQUISITORS

By Joel Bleifuss

Could it be that Hillary Rodham Clinton is the spawn of Satan? If congressional Republicans are to be taken seriously, one may well wonder. *Newsweek's* editors apparently consider it a valid question. "Saint or Sinner?" screams the magazine's January 15 cover story. And *New York Times* columnist William Safire has no doubt, publicly damning Hillary as a "congenital liar."

But the disposition of Hillary's soul isn't the real concern of Capitol Hill's grand inquisitors. So far, Senate Whitewater committee chair Alfonse D'Amato has succeeded in whipping up a national debate about the vices and virtues of the First Lady while obscuring any fair examination of the evidence against her. In the Republicans' rush to judgment, all sense of proportion has been abandoned.

Late in December, House Speaker Newt Gingrich even took exception to the term "Whitewater." "I think that's a misnomer," he said. "I think that they are the Clinton scandals." Those scandals will, he promised, play a role in the 1996 presidential election—an idea that can't be far from the mind of D'Amato, chair of Bob Dole's presidential campaign. In that December 30 interview on CNN's *Evans and Novak*, Gingrich predicted that in the coming year Whitewater would have "a corrosive impact every day" on Clinton. He added that Congress would "not be doing its job" if it failed to "look into that kind of abuse of power." The scandals are "huge," said the Speaker. Within weeks the national press corps was parroting the Gingrich line. On January 22 *Newsweek's* Michael Isikoff reported on "what Washington is calling 'the Clinton scandals.'"

These so-called scandals have one flaw: All have been constructed using innuendo and disinformation as evidence.

Take the controversy over the Rose Law Firm billing

records that were recently found in the Clintons' private residence. The discovery of those records, which chronicle legal work Hillary performed for Madison Guaranty Savings & Loan, has been touted as proof that *something* is being covered up at the White House. But neither Republicans nor reporters have provided a reason for why the Clintons would have wanted to withhold those records. In fact, the records support what Hillary Clinton has maintained for years: that she did "minimal" work for Madison Guaranty, the S&L owned by the Clintons' former Whitewater investment partner, James McDougal.

The records show that Hillary billed the failed savings and loan for 60 hours of work. That may sound like a lot, but not when you consider that those 60 hours were spread out over 65 weeks—and that those were lawyer hours. In a January interview with Barbara Walters, of ABC's *20/20*, Hillary said, "I'm glad the records

were found. I wish they had been found a year or two ago, because they verify what I've been saying from the very beginning. I worked about an hour a week for 15 months. That was not a lot of work for me, certainly."

But many members of the press don't buy that denial, and as proof they point to a statement she made in her April 22, 1994 Whitewater press conference. The trouble is, this quote has been taken out of context, and then used to tar Hillary.

The first member of the national media to misrepresent Hillary's statement was Jeff Greenfield of *Nightline*. The December 19 *Nightline* transcript reads like this:

Jeff Greenfield: Hillary Clinton did some legal work for Madison Guaranty at the Rose Law Firm, at a time when her husband was governor of Arkansas. How much work? Not much at all, she has said.

[File footage of Hillary Clinton speaking at the 1994 Whitewater press conference]: The young attorney, the young bank officer, did all the work. It was not an area that I practiced in, it was not an area that I really know anything, to speak of, about.

On *Nightline*, Hillary's 1994 quote was presented as if it were one consecutive thought. But *Nightline* omitted an additional 39 words that fell between Hillary's first and second sentence. (There are no ellipses in the transcript reflecting that omission.) The reporters who then relied on this statement as proof of Hillary's mendacity include Safire and his *Times* colleague Maureen Dowd, both of whom could use a remedial course in fact-checking.

Greenfield, Dowd and Safire used the out-of-context

quote to demonstrate that Hillary was lying about the extent of her involvement with Madison. In fact, when Hillary said other individuals “did all the work” she was responding to a question about whether she had ever done any “regulatory work” for Madison Guaranty, not whether she had ever done *any* legal work for the thrift.

“If I was going to call anybody a liar I would look for the context of the quote and check it before I went to press,” says Gene Lyons, a columnist for the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*. Lyons has been closely following the Whitewater story, detailing what he calls “astounding examples of journalistic malpractice.”

So what exactly was Hillary asked at the 1994 press conference, and how did she respond? What follows is a condensed version of the exchange. Hillary’s actual response was 618 words long.

Unnamed reporter: One other thing that I’ve had problems with. During the campaign ... you made a statement ... that you never did any regulatory work for Madison Guaranty. When the letter went to Arkansas Securities Commissioner Beverly Bassett Schaffer about perhaps the legality of offering preferred stock, your name was at the bottom of that letter.

Hillary: Right.

Reporter: Can you explain that?

Hillary: Yes. I’m glad you asked that, because that’s another thing that I feel has gotten confused in the telling. ... There was a very bright young associate [Richard Massey] in our law firm who had a relationship with one of the officers at Madison, a young man whom he had known. They began talking.

And if you’ll remember what happened when the S&Ls were deregulated, many states were left wholly unprepared: they did not have a regulatory system in place, they didn’t even really have good laws. All of a sudden there was no federal regulation to speak of, and so people were asking state governments whether things could be done.

Those two young men thought that it would be legal under Arkansas law for a savings and loan to issue preferred stock. But there was absolutely no law on that, and so they couldn’t be sure. But they decided that what they wanted to do was to ask the person who regulated savings and loans [Beverly Bassett Schaffer] whether it was legal—not if Madison could do it. ...

When they talked about doing that, the young attorney in question needed a partner to serve as his backstop, that was one of the rules we had at our firm. ... So he came to me and asked me if I would talk with Jim [McDougal] to see whether or not Jim would let the lawyer and the officer go forward on this project. I did that, and I arranged that the firm would be paid a \$2,000-a-month retainer [as] an advance against billing. That was arranged. The young attorney [and] the young bank officer did all the work, and the letter was sent. But because I was what we called the billing attorney—in

other words, I had to send the bill to get the payment made—my name was put on the bottom of the letter. It was not an area that I practiced in, it was not an area that I really know anything, to speak of, about.”

In the end, the state regulator Hillary had written said Madison could legally issue the stock, but only if the thrift could first demonstrate financial soundness. Madison was unable to do so, and the matter was dropped.

When considered by an impartial observer, Hillary’s 1994 explanation—as well as the recently discovered billing records—show that Hillary indeed did only “minimal” work for Madison and had little, if anything, to hide. But Senate Whitewater committee chair Alfonse D’Amato insists that the billing records indicate “numerous and extensive communications between Hillary Clinton and Madison Guaranty S&L” and thereby prove “a pattern of deception, deceit and memory loss” on the part of the White House.

The Republican line was amplified in tabloid publisher Rupert Murdoch’s new magazine, *The Weekly Standard*, a publication produced by a self-described “happy band of right-wing maniacs.” The January 22 issue featured a “Tricky Hillary” cover story, illustrated with a picture of Hillary as Nixon. *Weekly Standard* contributing editor Tod Lindberg parrots D’Amato’s line, stating that the 60 hours Hillary worked clearly constitute more than “minimal” work. But nowhere in his four-page story does Lindberg





mention that the hours billed cover a period of one year and three months. This leads one to question Lindberg's conclusion—and the fervent hope of Republicans—that “it is no longer irresponsible to mention the words ‘indictment’ and ‘Hillary Clinton’ in the same sentence.”

In tandem with the billing records controversy, new questions have arisen involving the White House travel office. But, in fact, only the questions are new; the matter itself has already been fully explained. In May 1993, Clinton aides fired the staff of the White House travel office, which even the GOP agrees had been grossly mismanaged under

the leadership of travel office director Billy Dale. In fact, travel office financial records were nonexistent, making any audit of the operation impossible.

Early last month the White House released a memo written by David Watkins, a former White House administrative aide, that spurred new speculation about Hillary's role in the travel office firings. Watkins, the aide dismissed for using a Marine helicopter to make a golf game, wrote the memo in the fall of 1993 to then-White House Chief of Staff Thomas McLarty. The memo reads, in part: “You explained that [the travel office mismanagement] was on the First Lady's ‘radar screen.’ ... We both know that there would be hell to pay if ... we failed to take swift and decisive action in conformity with the First Lady's wishes.”

Rep. William Clinger (R-PA), who heads the House committee that has been investigating the travel office firings, pounced on the memo. Clinger claimed that it showed Hillary had played a much larger role in the affair than she'd previously admitted. “There was a cover-up here,” he charged. There is, however, nothing new in the Watkins memo. A March 18, 1994 report on Travelgate by the Justice

Department's Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR) provides a detailed account of Hillary's conversations with Watkins and late deputy White House counsel Vincent Foster Jr. The OPR reported that Watkins said “he understood from Foster that the matter was ‘on her radar screen.’ ” The report goes on to say: “According to Watkins, he telephoned Mrs. Clinton. He relayed the information he had received from [Watkins aide Patsy] Thomasson about sloppy and near nonexistent record-keeping procedures by the Travel Office. [Watkins] also told her that the auditors had found petty cash unaccounted for. In short, he informed her that things in the Travel

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Office were worse than they had originally thought. ... According to Watkins, Mrs. Clinton said that she had talked with [her friend] Harry Thomason and that he believed that Watkins could have a new travel operation in place very quickly. She also said that she had received advice from several others that 'we've made a mistake by not getting our people into jobs sooner.' "

A May 1994 report from the General Accounting Office (GAO) said much the same thing. According to the GAO, "On May 14, [1993], Mr. Watkins talked with the First Lady and told her that [the accounting firm] KPMG had found sloppy management in the Travel Office. He said that she urged that action be taken to get 'our people' into the Travel Office to help achieve the 25 percent White House staff cut. According to Mr. Watkins, the First Lady also mentioned, in the context of the Travel Office, that the administration had been criticized for being slow in making appointments."

For her part, Hillary Clinton does not deny that she was concerned about the travel office mismanagement. In a January 12 interview with ABC's Barbara Walters on *20/20*, she said: "Well, I think what is fair to say is that I did voice concern about the financial mismanagement that was discovered, when the president arrived here, in the White House travel office. I think that everyone who knew about it was quite concerned, and wanted it to be taken care of. But I did not make the decision. I did not direct anyone to make the decision. But I have absolutely no doubt that I did express concern, because I was concerned about any kind of financial mismanagement." Congenital liar? No, congenital lawyer.

In the January 22 *Weekly Standard*, Byron York attempted to bolster the flimsy Travelgate charges by citing the conspiratorial musings of unnamed "investigators." "Investigators believe," York hinted darkly, "that without an understanding of Travelgate, it is impossible to comprehend the series of events surrounding the death of Vincent Foster that now form the core of the investigation being carried out by the Senate Whitewater Committee."

Were any laws broken in Travelgate? No. So what is all the congressional fuss about the travel office about? The answer is politics.

In one of the more hilarious episodes in this silly and sordid saga, *Nightline*'s Ted Koppel tried four times to get D'Amato to explain the significance of Travelgate. At one point, Koppel asked, "[S]o what if you can prove the worst of what you suspect? What's going to happen? You don't, you know, you don't impeach a First Lady. None of these things appears to be an indictable offense. Where will it all lead other than to some kind of political effect in this upcoming election?" D'Amato replied that he is uncovering "an abuse of power" that "is closely—very closely—parallel to what took place in Watergate."

As usual, D'Amato could offer no evidence to support his claim. As for the hyperbolic Gingrich, he maintains that

Whitewater is actually worse than Watergate. "You know," Gingrich told Evans and Novak in his December interview, "Watergate was one break-in and one cover-up, so you had sort of a clear line you could follow. This is nine or 10 different scandals." When asked to elaborate on this latter assertion, no one in Gingrich's press office was able to enumerate the other scandals—perhaps because they're still being cooked up.

The Reagan and Bush years demonstrated, and Gingrich clearly understands, that in Washington hard facts will never trump conventional wisdom. Robert Parry, author of the 1992 book *Fooling America: How Washington Insiders Twist the Truth and Manufacture the Conventional Wisdom*, believes the inquisition of Hillary represents the work of the GOP's well-honed attack machine.

According to Parry, what we are seeing is a classic "oppo," an exercise in opposition research that entails digging up dirt on your political opponent and then convincing the media to magnify it. "The real purpose of oppo is to take some mistake and blow it out of proportion," says Parry. "Usually there is some truth to it. And there is truth to Whitewater. Hillary and Bill deserve criticism for trying to profit off their positions in Arkansas, but the Republicans have taken these misdeeds, exaggerated them and attacked Clinton."

Not surprisingly, any material unearthed that has discredited the Republicans has been rapidly dismissed. For example, the Senate Whitewater committee investigation uncovered evidence revealing that the Bush White House in the run-up to the 1992 election had contacted S&L regulators about the Clintons' involvement with Madison Guaranty. (See *In These Times*, August 22, 1994.) However, when Sen. John Kerry (D-MA) attempted to pursue the matter in the summer of 1994, D'Amato quickly ruled the question out of order.

Not surprisingly, an oppo can only work if members of the press are willing to take the proffered bait. Unfortunately, too many journalists, with visions of Woodward and Bernstein dancing in their heads, have helped inflate a minor news story into a modern-day inquisition.

New York Times columnist Anthony Lewis faults the press for too readily believing the Whitewater committee's propaganda. In his January 15 column, Lewis wrote, "The D'Amato performance is right out of the Joe McCarthy book: Promise horrors and prove nothing. But there is a big difference. The press cottoned on to Senator McCarthy and checked out what he said. On Whitewater, the press too often seems an eager accomplice of the accusers."

As Whitewater committee member Christopher Dodd (D-CT) aptly put it: "The committee's recent history leaves no doubt to this member that we are no longer impartial senators serving on a Senate panel, but we have become players in the opening act of the 1996 presidential campaign."

Next issue: *Castle Grande—the GOP's Whitewater sand castle.*

UNIONS

Motor city showdown

*An insider's
account of
Detroit's
bitter
newspaper
strike.*

By John Lippert

“**T**his is about that whole philosophy of entitlements. This has become the zenith, if you will, of philosophical differences between management and labor. It crystallized here in Detroit.”

That's how Frank Vega describes Detroit's 6-month-old newspaper strike. Vega is CEO of Detroit Newspapers, which prints and distributes the *Detroit Free Press* and the *Detroit News*. He allowed himself such soaring rhetoric in December, when he was, no doubt, cheering the French government's efforts to put down that country's transportation strikes. Also, he needed a snappy retort to Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer. Claiming to speak for an impatient business community, Archer had called on the newspapers to stop stalling and start talking, since the strike was hurting Detroit's overall economy and threatening to put at

least one newspaper out of business.

Vega insisted, though, that there's no upper limit to the time or money the newspapers are willing to spend to permanently replace 2,000 union workers.

I'm one of those workers. For seven years prior to the strike, I was the *Free Press* labor writer. The strike has cost me \$30,000 in lost wages. At age 42, with two daughters nearing college age, it has me waking up every day in a sweat, wondering what to do.

I survive on \$150 a week in Newspaper Guild strike benefits. I do freelance writing and odd jobs to supplement my wife's income as a nurse. I spend lots of time at strike headquarters.

Our goal is to make the strike prohibitively expensive, primarily by asking readers not to read and advertisers not to advertise. In that regard, we're not doing half bad. Revenue from advertising and circulation is down by at least one-third. After-tax losses and missed profits, by the newspapers' own admission, will total \$250 million by year's end. Even the *New York*

Times wondered whether union-busting in Detroit “would be worth the cost.”

After six months, we've got hundreds of strikers who work every day on boycotts, picket lines, a food bank and a strike newspaper that's distributed to 300,000 people each week. After six months, the newspapers are no longer viable economic enterprises. Only huge injections of cash are propping them up. As long as that's true, we've got a chance.

Whatever the outcome, this is one of the signature labor battles of the 1990s. It will help shape whether companies nationwide choose between labor peace and labor war, and how unions decide which tactics work and which don't. It will also serve as a grim reminder that profit targets set on Wall Street are, more directly than ever before, defining what Americans are offered as news.

The issues behind the strike are straightforward, if not easily resolved. The combined *Free Press* and *News*, after a decade of heavy losses, made \$56 million in 1994. That's 12 cents on every dollar of sales, a profit margin more than twice as large as that of Chrysler, the most profitable car company on the planet. But it's not enough for Wall Street, which insists on the same 20 percent profit margin that Gannett Co. Inc.—which co-owns Detroit Newspapers with Knight-Ridder Inc.—earns at small-town, nonunion newspapers all over the country.

As pressure on managers in Detroit increased, Gannett torpedoed normal collective bargaining. During the 18 months prior to the strike, all major grievances by the Teamsters union had to be arbitrated. In the mailroom, where newspapers are assembled prior to distribution, management complained bitterly that workers were sabotaging

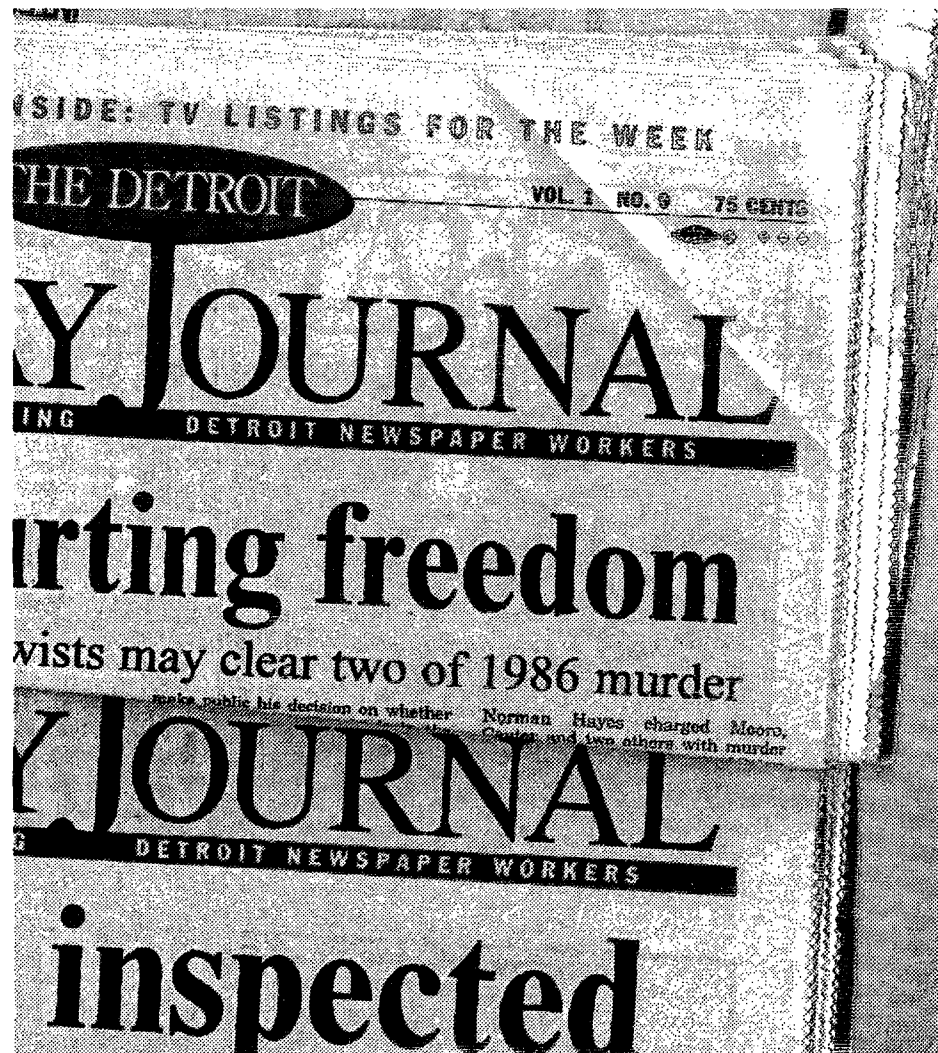
production. The workers, in turn, accused managers of incompetence.

From the beginning, management's contract proposals were designed mostly for public consumption. A 10.3 percent wage increase over three years sounds OK, if you don't mention that workers hadn't had a base wage increase since 1991 and were being asked to shoulder heftier out-of-pocket expenses for Blue Cross insurance. A no-layoff pledge sounds fine, if you don't mention that it only applies to current employees, and that the company intends to outsource future work. For example, management insisted on the right to outsource mailroom and composing room work at any time, and to gradually create a nonunion distribution system.

Over and over, the unions whittled down their proposals, and indicated an openness to even more whittling. Over and over, the newspapers refused to budge. By December, when Mayor Archer tried to mediate, the newspapers said flatly that the unions had no hope of forcing out the scabs, no hope of changing union-busting terms and conditions the company had unilaterally imposed.

Unquestionably, the newspapers were far more prepared for the strike than we were. Frank Vega, to his credit, had been wining and dining suburban police officials and key advertisers for months, quietly lining up support. The unions, on the other hand, kept hoping the newspapers would deal. We spent months on basic organizational steps, like consolidating our offices and computer systems, to actually run the strike.

Maybe we could have worked without a contract, and pressured the company from inside the building, adopting a "work to rule" strategy in order to slow the company down enough to bring it back to the bargaining table. Maybe we could have designed some grand compromise. It's worth noting, however, that most of our members, including some who've since crossed picket lines, were clamoring for a strike. That's particularly true among Newspaper Guild members at the *News*, where management—just before the strike—implemented a merit-pay plan geared toward favoritism and dumped the idea of across-the-board increases in base pay. If we'd continued working at that point, management would no doubt have imposed other onerous conditions throughout the newspapers.



Copies of the *Detroit Sunday Journal*, the weekly paper produced by the city's striking newspaper workers.

In his December statement, Vega said that the unions' inability to stop the newspapers from

publishing meant the strike had failed, pure and simple. Some of our members say the same thing, and want us to organize a crowd big enough to seize the gates at the newspapers' printing plant in suburban Sterling Heights.

The problem is that we're not just fighting media giants like Gannett and Knight-Ridder. We're fighting Detroit-area TV and radio outlets, which tend to mimic the newspapers' antiunion rhetoric. We're fighting the combined weight of the police and the courts. According to a source who asked to remain anonymous, John Jaske, Gannett's top labor negotiator, ordered a delivery truck driver to crash through a gate in early September, even though picketers were assembled just outside it. Three Sterling Heights police officers, whose superiors were in close contact with Jaske, stood nearby and made no effort to intervene.

After repeated picket-line confrontations, we're wrestling with a court injunction that limits picketing at Sterling

Heights, and a dangerous federal racketeering lawsuit. Are we facing a conspiracy? Not exactly. The best analysis comes from William Goodman, a Detroit attorney. Goodman represents James Mikonczyk, a striker who suffered a broken leg, a broken hip, a shattered elbow and other injuries when he was run down by the gate-crashing delivery truck. The police have issued no criminal charges, not even a traffic ticket. "The Detroit police share power in this town with the Detroit newspapers," Goodman says. "Jim Mikonczyk shares power, if he's lucky, with the squirrels in his front yard."

In the face of such concerted opposition, the unions' main strategy has been to appeal for public support, and to focus that support in ways that hurt the newspapers. Despite repeated assertions by Vega and others that the strike's impact had peaked during the summer, 800 advertisers—about half of the newspapers' clientele—stayed out during the critical Christmas rush. Four additional car dealers pulled after unions intensified their handbilling in January. In response, the newspapers are slashing ad rates. Dozens of major advertisers, and thousands of subscribers, are delinquent in bills worth tens of millions of dollars.

Even under the most optimistic scenarios, the newspapers expect combined daily circulation to stabilize at 650,000. That's a loss of about 500,000 subscribers since their joint operating agreement began in 1989, and about 250,000 since the strike started in July. Carriers are dumping so many unopened bundles of newspapers in local recycling centers that the city of Farmington Hills has asked them to hire a private disposal company. The newspapers are having so much trouble finding carriers that for the first time in a decade they're hiring teenagers instead of adults. In November, just before announcing the strike was much more expensive than first indicated, a dozen top executives sold or otherwise disposed of stock shares in the two parent companies worth \$7.9 million. These included John Curley, the Gannett CEO, and Anthony Ridder, the Knight-Ridder CEO.

Despite this news, the unions can't hold out forever. Since the strike started in July, six Teamsters have died from what union leaders believe were strike-induced heart attacks or other ailments. Lots of workers are losing their homes and cars; lots have been arrested and fired. Our members, when they have a bad day, feel disconnected and scared, and they start seeking their own solutions to the mess we're in. That can include everything from vandalism, even though that contradicts union policy, to going off individually and finding other jobs. Clearly, though, the unions can hold out for a while.

Ron Carey, president of the Teamsters, and John Sweeney, president of the AFL-CIO, consider the Detroit strike a top priority. Union staffers in Washington are, among things, pressing for federal regulatory crackdowns on the newspapers' insider trading and antitrust abuses, and orchestrating national handbilling campaigns at scab advertisers, including 300 Kmart stores nationwide. Stephen

Yokich, the UAW president, authorized \$300,000 to help strikers pay bills at Christmas. Hundreds of UAW activists and others have helped with handbilling of advertisers and other strike tasks.

The AFL-CIO, along with the Teamsters, the Communications Workers, the Newspaper Guild and the Typographers, recently ponied up more than \$600,000 to help launch our weekly strike paper, the *Detroit Sunday Journal*. It's a 40-page tabloid that comes complete with news, sports, comics, a horoscope, a crossword puzzle and, last but not least, a TV book. Since it started in November, the newspaper has been a big hit, giving us credibility and a presence we wouldn't have otherwise. It's supplemented our strike benefits by, among other things, paying union members who distribute the *Journal* a commission of 10 cents on every copy sold through stores and gas stations.

What, then, are the prospects for Detroit's newspaper war? At this point, it's a draw. Both sides have landed some solid punches. Both sides are in danger of losing everything.

Inside the *Free Press*, the reporting staff is divided among a small group of management sycophants, a large number of newly hired scabs who just want to get some time in and a large number of people who are scared to death.

A key benchmark will come in early February, when Knight-Ridder announces 1995 earnings. Analysts now predict earnings of \$2.58 per share, down 57 cents from 1994's profits. They expect Knight-Ridder to take a heavier hit from the Detroit strike than Gannett, which is a bigger company. The scariest question is whether Knight-Ridder believes the *Free Press* can survive. A top editor used to say openly, for example, that the newspaper could do nothing, on its own, to reverse its chronic circulation decline. The hefty expenses of news-gathering, he said, simply weren't worth the trouble.

Today, the *Free Press* city desk has 29 reporters, compared to 52 prior to the strike. These numbers give an ominous credibility to critics who accuse chains like Gannett and Knight-Ridder of using newspapers as cash cows as they diversify into broadcast and cable TV, and other businesses. The bottom line is that these companies believe less and less in newspapers. That's why they were so reckless in provoking the strike, and that's why in the eight years I worked for the *Free Press* the company never made a sustained effort to engage its workers—union or otherwise—in a collaborative approach to problem-solving.

"If death comes to newspapers, it'll be death by suicide," says Gene Roberts, the *New York Times* managing editor. "It'll be because we starved ourselves to death in the name of becoming healthier companies." ◀

John Lippert is the *Detroit Free Press* labor writer and a member of Newspaper Guild Local 22. He encourages anyone wishing to support the Detroit unions to call the strike office at (313) 965-1478.

RUSSIA

The Yeltsin syndrome

Uncovering the political and psychological roots of Boris Yeltsin's increasingly brutal rule.

By Fred Weir
MOSCOW

W

hen Boris Yeltsin was a boy, he and some friends stole a live grenade from a military storehouse and scampered off to a secluded spot to dismantle it. In his 1990 memoir, *Against the Grain*, Yeltsin relates how he solved the riddle of getting the thing open: "I put the grenade on a stone, knelt down, and hit it with a hammer. ... There was an explosion and two of my fingers were mangled."

Yeltsin's left hand still bears the scars of that explosion, and he no doubt retains a vivid memory of the incident—from which he apparently has drawn all the wrong lessons.

In his five years as president of Russia, Yeltsin has repeatedly taken a sledgehammer to complex and volatile political problems, achieved roughly analogous results—and been similarly proud of it.

In the fall of 1993, Yeltsin severed what he described as "the Gordian Knot" of deadlock between himself and a rambunctious legislature by abolishing the constitution, dissolving parliament and driving off lawmakers with tanks and gunfire when they resisted.

But the war in Chechnya, now in its 14th bloody month, is perhaps his greatest folly. After an estimated 30,000 deaths, most of them civilian, the conflict shows every sign of spreading and deepening.

"Our leaders thought the Chechnya war would be brief and victorious and that it would solidify state power in Russia," says Andrei Kolganov, a professor of political science at Moscow State University and coordinator of the Union of Internationalists, a Moscow-based antiwar group. "The opposite has happened. The war threatens to go on forever, and with each new spiral of violence it further erodes the moral and political foundations of Russia."

Chechnya, an oil-rich, largely Muslim republic of 1.5 million people on Russia's southern fringe, declared independence amid the chaos of the Soviet Union's breakup in 1991. Dzhokhar Dudayev, supported by Yeltsin when he overthrew local hard-line Communists, was elected president of the republic that fall.

For more than three years, Chechnya lived in a kind of twilight independence, unrecognized by Moscow or the world community. The republic never signed the Federation treaty, which formed the post-Soviet Russian state, nor did it participate in the 1993 constitutional referendum that vested near-absolute powers in the Russian presidency or the legislative elections held later that year. Nevertheless, Chechnya somehow managed to transport its oil to the world market through Russian territory during those years; at the same time, Dudayev mysteriously acquired a vast arsenal of weaponry that his men would later use to devastating effect against invading Russian troops. Although these Chechen mysteries have never been sufficiently explained, most observers point to corruption in top Moscow political circles.

Just as elusive is a firm explanation of why Yeltsin's patience with Dudayev suddenly snapped on December 11, 1994, when, without consulting parliament, he decided the Chechnya conundrum could be resolved with a vigorous bashing—sending 40,000 Russian troops to subdue the breakaway republic. The invasion of Chechnya led to an irrevocable break between Yeltsin and the liberal forces that originally brought him to power. They accused Yeltsin of using the crisis as an excuse to stifle opposition. "Before the army went in, there were any number of ways to deal with the Dudayev challenge,"



says Kolganov. "It was a difficult, knotty problem, but it might eventually have been unraveled by conciliation and democratic political means. The most important thing is that we had peace in Russia. There was no terrorism, no burning cities, no thousands of refugees. Yeltsin started all that. And as the war has gone from one bloody horror to the next, he has continually raised the stakes."

The latest phase of the nightmare began January 9, when a band of some 350 Chechen guerrillas crept into the town of Kizlyar in the neighboring republic of Dagestan and seized 3,000 hostages. It was a repeat of a highly successful raid against the southern Russian city of Budyonnovsk last June, which compelled the Kremlin to open short-lived peace negotiations with Dudayev.

At Kizlyar, however, Russian authorities refused to negotiate. Instead, they sent local Dagestani officials to talk to the Chechen guerrilla leader, Salman Raduyev. An agreement was reached. Raduyev released most of his captives and in return was granted safe passage back to Chechnya with about 100 hostages, who were to be freed once the guerrillas reached the border. But Russian security forces blew up a vital frontier bridge, forcing the rebels to fall back on the tiny Dagestani village of Pervomayskaya, where they were able to dig in and prepare their defenses for six days.

Only then did Yeltsin reach for his hammer. Declaring that "we must punish them, and terrorism must be uprooted from the Chechen land," he ordered Russian troops to bombard and then storm the village. As in all things connected with the Chechen war, official predictions of a swift and happy ending proved fatally misguided. For three days and nights, Chechen defenders held out and repeatedly repulsed the cream of Moscow's antiterrorist forces. Finally, Russian officials claimed all hostages had already been executed by their Chechen captors and launched a killing barrage of Pervomayskaya with Grad rockets, which can wreak indiscriminate destruction.

When Russian forces entered the village on January 18, they found it thoroughly leveled and the ruins choked with bodies. President Yeltsin, declaring victory and apparently unconcerned about the glaring contradictions in his statements, said 82 hostages had been freed and 153 Chechen gunmen "eliminated." "Mad dogs must be shot," Yeltsin told journalists. But Russian officials now admit that Chechen leader Raduyev and at least 100 of his men broke out of Pervomayskaya and escaped into the mountains of Chechnya, taking dozens of hostages with them. The Kremlin's humiliation would seem complete. "There have been more than a few stupid operations in Chechnya, but the storm-

ing of Pervomayskaya was really something special," says Pavel Felgenhauer, the defense and national security editor for the daily *Segodnya* newspaper.

Some Russian media blame the fiasco on the country's ill-prepared and badly motivated military forces. Others attribute the operation's mindless brutality to rivalries between security organizations, or to the traditional mendacity and ineptness of Russian bureaucracy. But most blame Yeltsin, accusing him of trying to shore up his tarnished image in preparation for the June 16 presidential elections. Some suspect that Yeltsin may be notching up the war with Chechnya as a pretext for canceling the elections altogether. "There are just two possibilities," says *Izvestia* columnist Otto Latsis. "Either the president's team has no intention of conducting free and fair elections, or they have made a big mistake. ... [Yeltsin] thinks he is showing strength with his actions in Pervomayskaya, but he is really just demonstrating his weakness and cruelty."

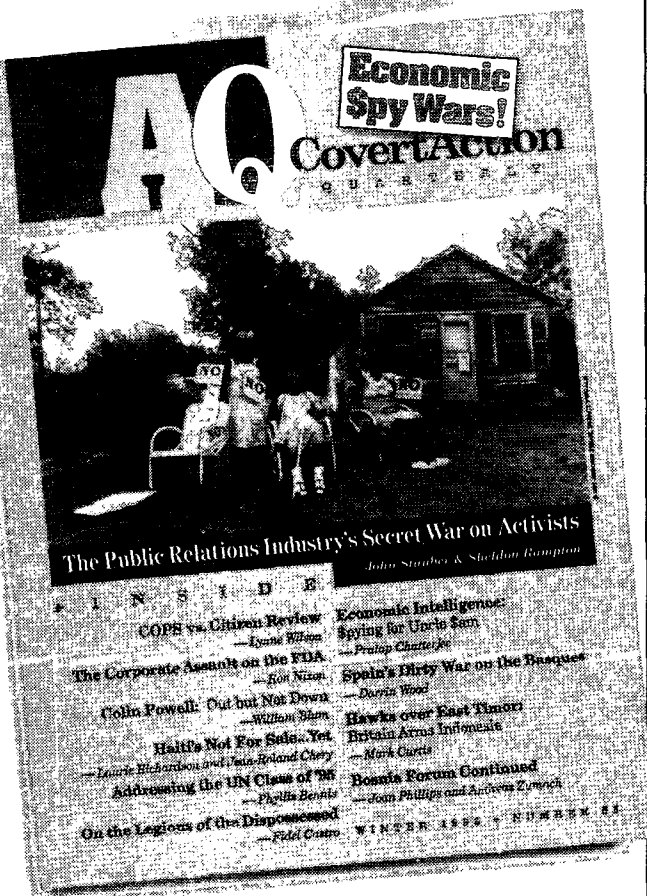
If that is so, he might do well to look for a new strategy. The Boris Yeltsin who brought down the Soviet Union five years ago was not a different man. But his appeal to Russians, and to the country's dozens of ethnic minorities, arguably was different. As he battled former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev for control, Yeltsin promised to build a new type of Russian state, one that would be distinguished from all its predecessors in being founded upon voluntary association, democracy, the rule of law and open politics.

In early 1991, Yeltsin told cheering crowds in the ethnic republic of Tatarstan that their yearnings for greater independence from Moscow would be easily satisfied in the state he envisioned: "Just take as much sovereignty as you can swallow," he said. And he mercilessly lambasted Gorbachev for the episodes of violence in Lithuania and Latvia that marred the otherwise peaceful demise of the USSR.

Yeltsin's shining hour came in August 1991, when he climbed onto a tank to bellow defiantly at a gang of hard-line coup plotters trying to turn back the tide of change. With the coup smashed, Yeltsin moved to consolidate power in his own hands. Few noticed—or cared at that point—that his methods clashed dramatically with his rhetoric. In a series of swift and utterly illegal hammer blows, Yeltsin compelled Gorbachev to abolish the Soviet parliament, seized control of administrative power and, at a secret meeting with Ukrainian and Belarussian leaders, dissolved the Soviet Union.

"What we have to finally recognize is that the roots of our present predicament lie in the duplicity and brutality with which Yeltsin's regime was established and consolidated," says Kolganov. "That is not to wish we could go back to the past, but it is necessary to go forward to a better future. The war in Chechnya is not an anomaly or even a mistake. It is an expression of the essence of the regime. As long as Yeltsin and the criminal clans around him remain in power, peace will be impossible." ◀

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B O S N I A

Peace without pluralism?

The four-year siege has taken its toll on Sarajevo's reputation as a multicultural capital.

Paul Hockenos
SARAJEVO

C

limbing the stairs to her fifth-floor apartment, Ljubica, a 55-year-old seamstress, points out the name plaques on either side of the stairwell. "Zujovic," she says, "Serb. Alibabic: Muslim. Jankovic: Croat married to a Serb. Pasic: Muslim," she goes on, out of breath as we reach the top floor.

"Most of the parents are still here," she says. "But the younger ones, if they've had the chance, have left." Today, Ljubica lives by herself in the modern, seven-room flat where she and her husband raised their three sons. Her husband was killed in 1993 when a grenade landed in the family garden patch. Her sons have fled to Zagreb. "They can go to Croatia because they have their father's name," she says. "But my father was Muslim, my mother Serb. I have nowhere to go, and why should I? Sarajevo is my home."

Even after nearly four years of siege, the people in government-held Sarajevo cling to their prewar identity as citizens of a multicultural city. Muslims, Orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croats, and even Jews and Gypsies, still live together here, and the Bosnian government insists that a sovereign, multiethnic, multid denominational Bosnia remains its goal.

But even the staunchest supporters of a multiethnic Bosnia admit the ideal, along with the city that once embodied it, has been badly battered. The severe conditions of the siege have triggered a mass exodus of native Sarajevans from the city. Before the war, roughly half of Sarajevo's 500,000 citizens were Muslim, a third Serb and 10 percent Croat. Today, the Serb and Croat populations number only about 65,000 and 20,000, respectively. At the same time, wave after wave of Muslim refugees from rural, Serb-captured territories has entered the city, bringing people with backgrounds and values different from those of the cosmopolitan Sarajevans.

In Cafe Lora, a small coffee bar tucked behind Marshal Tito Street, the last remaining members of the city's once-vibrant cultural scene still gather in the evenings. But the young journalists, artists and students admit the handful of cafes and clubs are just a shadow of what thrived before the war. "Our cafes are like a world unto themselves," says Alma Duranovic, a Muslim who writes for a weekly magazine. "Amongst ourselves we try to live like before. But it's hard—we know it's just not that way anymore."

To most Sarajevans, the ethnic passions that ripped apart their country are still incomprehensible. "Nationality and religion were never issues between me and my friends, and they're not now," says Bogdan Zivotic, a 26-year-old photographer whose mother is Croat and father is Serb. He says he feels no pressure or resentment from Muslims, even at his workplace, the police department. "I'm still here because I believe in Bosnia. I'm treated just like everyone else, like a Bosnian."

Nonetheless, Sarajevo's non-Muslim communities have been decimated by the war. Once a week, one of Sarajevo's four synagogues opens its doors to the 400 Sephardic Jews who remain in the city. Before the war broke out, 1,500 Jews lived in Sarajevo, down from a pre-World War II high of 40,000. "We're hoping that many of our people will come back now that there's peace," says Dragica Levy of Sarajevo's Jewish relief agency. "Otherwise, this war would effectively spell the end of nearly five centuries of Jewish life in Bosnia."

Levy points out that the Jews who have left the city have fled the war and the siege, not anti-Semitic discrimination or racial persecution. "We always got along well with our neighbors here in Sarajevo, Muslims and Christians alike,"

she says. "Today, it's no different."

In contrast to the sparsely attended churches, Sarajevo's mosques are full. The war has prompted a resurgence in religious interest among Muslims, bringing many formerly nonobservant Muslims into the mosques as well as religion classes. "When I was a teenager I didn't even know what it meant to be a Muslim," says Zlatan Nezirovic, a 24-year-old computer programmer. "But today, it's important to me. It's who I am and I'm learning about it."

For the first time in his life, Zlatan is observing Islamic holidays and abstaining from alcohol and pork. "The Bosnians were never good Muslims," he says laughing, alluding to their reputation in socialist Yugoslavia for relishing life's earthy pleasures. "But today, many more Muslims are starting to take Islam seriously, to explore this part of themselves."

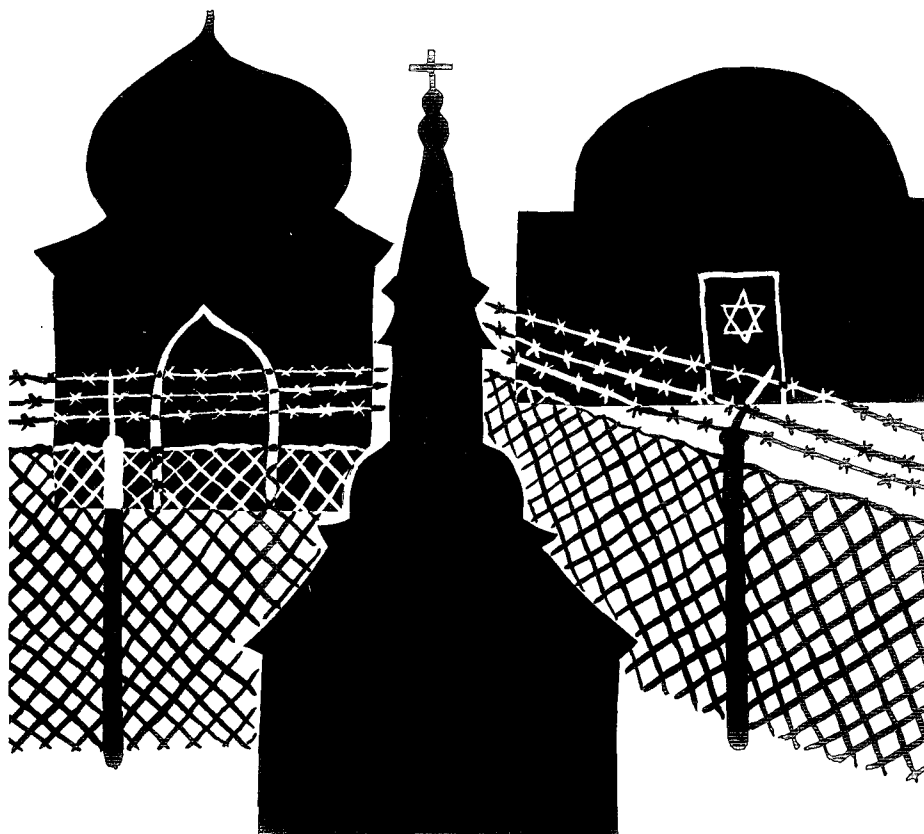
The religious upsurge among Muslims is also a consequence of the sheer number of refugees in Sarajevo, which U.N. officials estimate at more than 115,000. "Even the Muslims from villages and towns weren't deeply religious before the war," says Alija Isakovic, a Bosnian writer. "But today, everything that was certain to them is gone."

The ethnic antagonisms that have engulfed Bosnia have inevitably taken their toll on Sarajevo. The remaining Serb and Croat populations have become tiny minorities in a Muslim-dominated state. While most Serbs and Croats say they feel no pressure from the state or their Muslim neighbors, others tell of harassment and intimidation.

Mirko T., an elderly Serb who asked to remain anonymous, complains that he has been under police surveillance since the war began in 1992. Bosnian authorities have routinely searched his flat and jailed him three times. "They accused me of collaborating with the Chetnik snipers," he says, referring to the Bosnian Serb gunmen who continue to fire on Sarajevo from the surrounding hills. Mirko says that he will leave Sarajevo for Bosnian Serb-held territory as soon as he receives official clearance, which the Bosnian government, citing security reasons, refuses to give him.

In the Bosnian Serb-held suburbs of Sarajevo, due to come under government control this month, most Serbs fear retaliation if they stay. Bosnian Serb propaganda has effectively fanned these fears, even prompting some to exhume the remains of deceased relatives to bring with them as they flee.

Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat politicians loyal to the



Bosnian government, as well as liberal Muslims, have sharply criticized government policy and the ruling Muslim nationalist party, the SDA. They charge that the SDA has ruthlessly brought state and municipal structures under party control, pushing Serbs and Croats out of all important positions. Government critics say that the non-Muslim nationalities are being made to feel unwelcome.

"The Serbs and Croats who have stayed here have defended Bosnia and the idea of Bosnia," says Sarajevo's Catholic Archbishop Pero Sudar. "But this government is slowly forcing them out of the country. Its methods aren't as brutal as those of the radical nationalists, but they have the same effect."

The Bosnian government maintains that it will protect the safety of all residents of the areas that it is due to assume control from the Bosnian Serbs—provided, of course, that they are not responsible for war crimes. "Sarajevo is one multinational city," says Mayor Tarik Kusposovic. "Serbs always have been and will remain part of it. We can't have a wall going through it, like Berlin or Nicosia."

In the coffee bars and on the streets, ill will toward Sarajevo's Serb and Croat residents is hard to detect. "We're proud of the Serbs and Croats who have stayed," says Alijana, a business student. "They could have left, but they stayed to defend our city. And, as you see," she gestures around her, "we've won."

MEXICO

PRI disposed?

W

hile the *Wall Street Journal* and other tribunes of business opinion strain to portray Mexico as an emerging economic power, the political crises plaguing Chiapas and a half-dozen other Mexican states suggest a very different state of affairs. In the past year, middle-class farmers have taken over town halls, blocked highways and staged large demonstrations to protest cuts in agricultural subsidies and credits. Government workers have used similar tactics to fight the privatization of PEMEX, the Mexican petroleum giant. As the Mexican economy crumbles, the government has been forced to use oil revenues to service the debt it amassed from President Clinton's \$40 billion dollar "rescue package." *Proceso*, one of Mexico's most respected magazines, warns of a social explosion.

Meanwhile, factional fighting within the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) has reached

unprecedented levels, prompting Amedo Avendaño, a Chiapas politician with close ties to the insurgent Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), to predict the fall of the Zedillo government this year. It may be a bit early to predict that the Zapatistas' red and black flag will be waving over the National Palace in Mexico City, but the EZLN has thrown its political weight behind the idea of a new constitutional convention.

The chaotic politics of Chiapas illustrates the depth of the governmental and social crisis. Avendaño, who ran for governor on the ticket of the left-wing opposition Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), is widely believed to have won the 1994 gubernatorial election. But an electoral commission dominated by the PRI declared Avendaño's opponent, Rodolfo Robledo, the winner. Avendaño refused to concede and unofficially claimed office in December 1994.

Avendaño's defiance was matched by that of his supporters, especially those among the militant campesino organizations that have carried out more than 600 land seizures in Chiapas in the past two years. These campesino groups, which control municipal governments in roughly a third of the state, recognize only Avendaño as governor and have refused to turn over local tax revenue to the PRI state government. Faced with these and other popular protests, Robledo resigned within two months of taking office.

While Chiapas has captured more attention in the foreign media than other Mexican states, it isn't the only state in crisis. From Michoacán to Veracruz to Oaxaca, contested election results have sparked fierce and often violent conflicts. Perhaps the most intense military showdown has taken place in the coastal state of Guerrero, where for the past nine months the Mexican Army has conducted military operations on a scale not seen since the mid-'70s. Protests broke out in the mountain community of Tepetitla last May as members of the Guerrero Council of 500 Years of Resistance, a group of indigenous activists, demanded the resignation of the president of the municipal council, a PRI member. They also demanded that the government establish economic development programs in the region.

The state government requested federal assistance to put down the protests. The army, supported by the Federal Judicial Police, has put up roadblocks in the southern mountains and throughout Guerrero and conducted sweeps in rural communities—but it has been unable to stop the movement. In December, a protest turned violent when the municipal president deputized and armed 50 PRI supporters to stop a demonstration. In the ensuing riot, the municipal headquarters was burned down. Two hundred families have fled to a neighboring township, and the army has set up a permanent post in the town.

With popular protest on the rise, Mexico's old political order is facing extinction.

By M.R. Jones

Rumors persist throughout Guerrero of rebel groups in the mountains, though campesino leaders dismiss such stories as thinly veiled justifications for military repression. For their part, military leaders maintain that the army's main business in the state is to build roads, while Federal Judicial Police officials claim they are in the area to fight delinquency and drug traffickers. Not surprisingly, the heavy military presence in the state has coincided with a rash of what appear to be politically motivated murders. Starting with the massacre of 17 peasant activists in the town of Aguas Blancas last June 28, at least one multiple killing has occurred in Guerrero every month. The latest murders occurred on December 28 in Alcozauca, a municipality governed by the PRD. Ten men dressed in military uniforms attacked a small store and kidnapped six men. The local farmers union leader found their bodies the next day. In a move that typifies its intransigence, the state government dismissed the killings as narcotics-related and refused to investigate.



Zapatista guerrillas symbolize discontent in Mexico—but dissent is not confined to Chiapas.

The violence hasn't been wholly one-sided, however: PRI officials and policemen have also been killed. But the EZLN has asked guerrilla groups in Guerrero to suspend any offensive action while it continues negotiations with the government. In light of recent diplomatic progress, such a strategy may make sense. One result of the peace negotiations in Chiapas was a commitment on the part of the government peace commission to help the EZLN conduct last month's National Indigenous Forum in San Cristóbal, the findings of which are to be submitted to the Mexican Congress as recommendations for new laws or constitutional reforms. The forum drew 300 representatives of 32 of Mexico's 64 indigenous peoples and represented the first time since the Spanish invasion that indigenous peoples have been accorded legal status.

The Zapatistas hosted the forum, but, abiding by their principle of "non-vanguardist" intervention, they declined to dictate a theoretical position for others to follow. Instead, leaders of the Indigenous Revolutionary Committee, the EZLN's top decision-making body, emphasized the need for tolerance and self-determination. Their goal, they claimed, has been to open the political space to all and to allow civil society to determine what changes to make.

The same orientation is reflected in the Zapatista National Liberation Front—or "the Frente," as it is known—a new political organization the EZLN inaugurated on New Year's Day. The Frente has already called for a convention to draft a new, more democratic constitution based on principles of economic and social justice. The Zapatistas intend the Frente to act as an umbrella organization uniting the various

opposition movements within Mexico, but they will not allow members of the Frente to seek political office. In fact, several pro-EZLN deputies have resigned from the Mexican congress to join the Frente.

The Zapatistas have modeled the Frente to accord with the results of the National Democratic Consultation, a national opinion poll the EZLN conducted in August 1995, in which more than a million Mexicans participated. The poll found that most Mexicans approve of the EZLN as a political force. But, in a reflection of the deep mistrust Mexicans harbor for politicians of all parties, respondents also expressed the desire that it not become a political party. The Zapatistas envision the Frente as an organized mass movement that keeps pressure on the political sector for policy changes and new programs. Rather than assuming power, the movement would stand outside the institutions of government as a way to maintain a grass-roots orientation and avoid its own corruption.

But the real issue in Mexico today is still the question of who will assume power. In December, a rumor crossed the international wires that a coup was imminent, and another news story circulated suggesting that Zedillo was deeply depressed and losing heart. Some observers predict a military coup, while others argue that the military—which, in addition to securing a 44 percent budget increase last year, has seen its role in Mexican politics considerably enhanced by the country's provincial crises—is happy with the power it has already assumed.

What is clear is that the economic policies of neoliberalism have failed. They have increased the fortunes of large multinational corporations and Mexico's multibillionaires, while bringing disaster upon the overwhelming majority of Mexicans, from the indigenous farmers of Guerrero to the professional middle class of Mexico City. It is also clear that a large and growing segment of the population is refusing to live with the system constructed by the PRI. The PRI is losing its ability to govern in the old way. No political party with a cohesive organization is now positioned to seize power, but people throughout the country are organizing themselves and becoming politically active. Some observers dismiss the "naive" revolutionaries from the southern mountains as, at best, quixotic idealists. Many Mexicans, on the other hand, hopefully await their vindication. But since we can trust in neither the "end of history" nor the "scientific" inevitability of revolution, we'll just have to wait and see what happens.

M.R. Jones is the pen name of a freelance writer living in the Minneapolis area.

VIEWPOINT

Hitting Gingrich where it hurts

By Stewart Acuff

With the GOP continuing to sink in popularity polls, many progressives have already begun to forget the full measure of the shock, dismay and paralysis that afflicted the American left in the wake of the Republican Party's 1994 electoral sweep. As president of the Atlanta Labor Council, however, I remember all too clearly the dismay that descended on progressive forces in our metropolis—Newt Gingrich's home turf.

In Atlanta that November, we kept waiting for the plan. We kept waiting for someone to offer the policy analysis, the grass-roots strategy, that could stop the reversal of 60 years of social progress. By December, however, it became abundantly clear that both the Democratic Party and its national leaders were ill-equipped to oppose Congress' new right-wing majority. While right-wingers were talking about blitzkrieg legislation, Democratic leaders—like stunned boxers after 10 rounds—were talking quietly about regrouping for 1996. But with House Majority Leader Dick Armey advocating the abolition of the minimum wage, and Sen. Nancy Kassebaum (R-KS) drafting legislation to end the 40-hour workweek, we in Atlanta knew that the next election would be too late.

During a series of discussions in the council, we came to believe that the crisis facing American progressives resulted largely from the left's—and, more specifically, from labor's—ceding of leadership to the Democratic

Party. Though we couldn't draft a national strategy in Atlanta, we felt uniquely qualified to mount a grass-roots direct action campaign against Gingrich and his congressional allies—a campaign that wouldn't need to be vetted by overly cautious Democratic leaders.

Today, looking back on the campaign that grew out of our discussions, I believe our experience offers an important case study for dispirited progressives. From the outset, we talked about direct action and mass demonstrations. Although direct action had rarely, if ever, been used by unions against members of Congress, we began to see the special need for a direct-action campaign against Gingrich. In mid-January, I circulated a memo to the city's labor leaders laying out the crisis, defining our special responsibility as Atlantans in any fight against Gingrich and listing a series of objectives that the labor council hoped to accomplish:

- Deny the appearance of a local or even national consensus behind the Gingrich agenda.
- Pull back the cover of the Contract with America to reveal the more dangerous issues underneath.
- Force a fight on every issue—turn their campaign from a blitzkrieg to trench warfare.
- Give the president a popular reason to use the veto.
- Raise Gingrich's negatives and define him as a controversial figure.

Direct action was not new to the Atlanta Labor Council. We had used mass demonstrations successfully in our fight with the '96 Olympic Committee over jobs, wages and union contracts. But we weren't sure how local labor leaders would feel about using direct action against Gingrich. We needn't have worried. In February, both our executive board and our full labor council unanimously approved the action. Our Jobs With Justice Committee, which is responsible for mobilizing union activists, began to organize the anti-Gingrich demonstration. We contacted every delegate to the Atlanta Labor Council, as well as all our active members. James Orange, the coordinator of our Industrial Union Department and a civil rights legend, joined me in speaking to local union meetings. In every speech, we focused on the congressional Republicans' plans to weaken the labor movement and drive down our standard of living; their plans to cut OSHA, Medicaid and Medicare; their plans to end the 40-hour workweek and eight-hour day; their plans to repeal prevailing wage requirements. We wanted to make sure that union members across wage, industry, gender and race lines knew that the Republicans weren't only after black welfare

This article was made possible by a grant from the Funding Exchange, which is supporting a series of stories on grass-roots efforts to counter the conservative political agenda.

mothers and brown immigrants.

The demonstration was scheduled for March 15. We had hoped for 100 participants—more than 300 showed up. Outside Gingrich's suburban Atlanta office, a team of Jobs With Justice activists blocked all four lanes of traffic with a labor council banner and another large banner that read "Boot Newt." As quickly as possible, we hustled as many demonstrators as we could into his headquarters chanting "Boot Newt." Once inside the office, trade unionists spoke about the effects that Republican proposals would have on the lives of their families and co-workers. Twenty minutes after we packed into Newt's office, a large contingent of county police and sheriff's deputies arrived. Though we left when the police asked us to, I was detained for about 15 minutes, and Orange and rank-and-file activist Melvin Stewart were arrested for demanding my release. The *Atlanta Constitution* carried a half-page report on the demonstration, including a thorough explanation of the issues we talked about. Two national networks carried the story. It was the lead story that day for local media.

The next night, 50 local labor leaders met with community activists at the labor council offices to discuss the event and plan our next move. In spite of the arrests, in spite of Gingrich and his talk-radio allies calling us thugs and threatening to sue us, everyone in the room was excited about what we'd done, thought it was important and wanted to do more. By the end of March, we had planned a demonstration for April 25, when Gingrich was to speak at the Georgia Senate Republican Caucus.

In the meantime, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) staged a protest in the chamber of the House of Representatives while the House was in session and took over Gingrich's Washington, D.C., office. SEIU locals and the Jobs With Justice coalition began demonstrating against Gingrich and his lieutenants all over the country.

On April 25, about 400 of us rallied outside while Gingrich spoke to a group of wealthy Republicans at a Cobb County private club. Because we had laid a solid foundation of information about Gingrich's plans for workers, we decided to broaden the demonstration so our ranks and our speakers included the National Organization for Women, the Concerned Black Clergy and the Rainbow Coalition.

From May 21 to May 23, we marched 30 miles with the Rev. Jesse Jackson from the middle of Gingrich's district to Martin Luther King Jr.'s gravesite. In June, Jobs With Justice coalitions all over the country organized more demonstrations against Gingrich and his allies. Though the demonstrations were not really enough to stop the congressional Republicans, or even slow them down, they had an impact. By midsummer, Gingrich was being defined as a controversial political figure and his poll numbers were dropping—partly as a result of the drumbeat of criticism, the mounting resistance, the slow but sure revealing of the gravity of the congressional Republicans' agenda and the

Speaker's own inability to respond effectively to criticism in the press and in the street.

On August 7, about 100 of us from the Atlanta Labor Council took over a forum organized by the Congressional Institute, a Washington, D.C., think tank. Gingrich was scheduled to detail his Medicare plan in the forum's keynote speech. In a half-page *New York Times* story about the demonstration, Adam Clymer wrote: "[T]he demonstrators were the angriest group he has confronted this summer over Medicare, the health care program for the elderly, which is one of the most incendiary issues in the Republican budget plan." David Broder, writing in the *Washington Post*, said that "the bitterness of the battle ahead was apparent today when a forum featuring House Speaker Newt Gingrich was disrupted by a group of protesters led by Rep. John Lewis, his Democratic colleague from Georgia. The noisy but nonviolent face-off was a sign of the high political stakes as the congressional budget battle starts to focus on Republican plans." For a variety of reasons—most importantly, his own extremism—Gingrich's approval rating in the polls had dropped this winter to about 30 percent.

The demonstrations against Gingrich were never huge—at least not until 2,500 protested Gingrich's visit to Seattle on January 11—but they accomplished much. They helped recast the political debate, they helped mobilize opponents of the Republican Congress, and they defined the Speaker as a controversial figure lacking consensus for his Contract.

Clearly, mass action and street demonstrations by themselves cannot beat the right-wing legislators, but they have played an important role in preparing us for the next stage of the fight: an all-out electoral struggle, beginning with massive voter registration and ending with a huge and well-organized door-to-door, block-by-block, get-out-the-vote campaign this November. For American unions, the anti-Gingrich demonstrations foreshadowed the arrival of a new AFL-CIO leadership: one intent on grounding the work of organized labor in the mobilization of a rank-and-file base committed to action and willing to raise hell. ◀

Stewart Acuff is president of the Atlanta Labor Council.

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I N T H E A R T S

My Antonia

D

utch director Marlene Gorris is known chiefly for directing one of the most uncompromising feminist films of the '80s, so of course she's been called a male-basher ever since. *A Question of Silence* (1982) was based on a real-life incident Gorris saw reported in a Dutch newspaper. Three women shoppers, strangers to each other, one day commit an impromptu murder. They kick and beat to death (with coat hangers and other furnishings) a man who runs a clothing boutique after he catches one of them shoplifting. Gorris transforms this apparently senseless crime into a pointed, diamond-hard parable of misogynist paranoia and female revolt, with the emphasis sharply on the latter. Topped with an icy gale of liberating laughter that carries women quite beyond the courts that men have made, *A Question of Silence*

Marlene Gorris
directs an
ambitious new
feminist epic.

By Pat Dowell

is still a bracing experience, and you can find it on video in outlets that stock a strong foreign section.

Alas, neither of Gorris' subsequent films—*Broken Mirrors* (1984), a grimmer tale of women's resistance, set in a brothel and in the lair of a rapist, and *The Last Island* (1990), an account of plane crash survivors on a desert island—has made it onto video or even into many American theaters. But perhaps that will change with the theatrical release this month of *Antonia's Line*, a passionate and pastoral matriarchal epic that threads its way through four generations of women who are giving birth to a feminist utopia in the Dutch countryside. It is the sort of genuine crowd-pleaser that invites at least formal comparisons with other successful European epics such as *Manon of the Spring* and *Fanny and Alexander*. It won the People's Choice award at last fall's Toronto Film Festival, and many observers, mostly male, are suggesting that Marlene Gorris has mellowed in her view of men.

The only thing wrong with that observation is that it misses the point of Gorris' work. Women are her subject. Men simply don't figure very prominently in her vision of the world, whether it's the urban milieu of *A Question of Silence* or the ageless Dutch village to which Antonia returns in 1945 to witness her mother's death and receive her inheritance, a farm. Antonia brings her teenage daughter (no sign of a father and no explanation, either), and together they set up a household that by its very existence begins to subvert the abusive patriarchal order of the peasant town.

Antonia naturally attracts the people that patriarchy's might-makes-right standard has discarded or defiled. The village idiot begins to follow her around. Antonia's daughter Danielle rescues the retarded daughter of a farmer who has raised his sons to be brutes and incestuous rapists. Antonia provides the local intellectual, a gentle but determined pessimist, with a reason to live on. And she attracts an offer of marriage from a good man, a widower with several fine sons who has lived in the neighborhood for 20 years. "It complicated his dealings with the other farmers," the narrator drily informs us, "but not with Antonia." The farmer tells her, "My sons need a mother." Antonia replies,



Antonia's Line
Directed by Marlene Gorris



"But I don't need your sons."

Other good men turn up in the film, such as the curate who leaves the church because "he couldn't reconcile his enjoyment of life with the church's enjoyment of death." But the men are distinctly part of the landscape of life with which the main characters, the women—Antonia's daughter (an artist), granddaughter (a musician) and great granddaughter (a writer)—all must cope.

Antonia's failed suitor accepts his place in her scheme of things, and often adds his family to the long table in the courtyard of her farmhouse, where sunny al fresco meals with Antonia's extended household form a recurring scene that marks the passage of time. And like a life or the harvest, the film moves from seed to fruit to withering and death, punctuated by exhilaration and pain. It is also visited by touches of magic, such as the moment when Antonia tells Danielle about how the town priest refused to give last rites to a man who saved Jews during the war. Danielle glances after the priest, who has just passed them in the churchyard, and sees a stone angel swat him with its wing. Unlike many practitioners of magical realism, Gorris well knows just how to use such effects, and when to lay them aside.

Like all epics, *Antonia's Line* has not only a hero(ine), but a villain. And he has a penis, which is his weapon of choice. He commits two pivotal rapes, but does not meet his

end at the hands of women, since Gorris clearly delineates deliberate cruelty and violence as the realm of men. She raises a rifle at him—but delivers instead a curse. The other men who learn of his crimes beat him to a pulp, however.

Gorris has added considerably to her film vocabulary in the 14 years since her first feature. In contrast to the stark didacticism of *A Question of Silence*, *Antonia's Line* has a warm feel and a lush cinematic style, fluidly moving through the seasons and in and out of a dozen lives so vividly rendered that viewers never have trouble keeping them straight.

Gorris had to persevere in bringing this story to the screen; the list of producers is a patchwork of European corporations and film funds. Gorris shot the film

in Belgium, which offered a greater range of relatively unspoiled villages, with a sturdy Dutch and Flemish cast led by Willeke van Ammelrooy, a statuesque woman you could believe was the Goddess incarnate. She has no difficulty playing both the youngish mother who comes home after World War II and the elderly Antonia who is so in touch with earth's realities that she can name the day of her death.

In an age that has witnessed a steady retreat from feminism, Gorris still hews to an uncompromising cultural feminism that emphasizes the female aspect of the world. She gathers into Antonia's line a variety of feminist identities and controversies. Abortion appears as a legitimate and perfectly respectable choice for one young woman, but she does not exercise that option, probably because the pastoral form of the story requires that fecundity be exalted.

One of Antonia's line does manage to relinquish motherhood, leaving it to her husband and her extended family to nurture the child she delivers. But the kind of matriarchal feminism so gloriously and irresistibly celebrated in this movie meets its limitations in that paradox—biology is still a destiny of sorts in this saga. Nearly every woman we meet is impelled to give birth. This is still the choice that most eludes women, not through law but through cultural pressures, whether they're matriarchal or patriarchal—even in so remarkable a film as *Antonia's Line*. ◀

I N P R I N T

Walter world

By Nick Salvatore

Throughout much of the last decade, many on the left cherished a fervent belief in the rebirth of the American labor movement. Much as the antiunion 1920s ultimately gave birth to a revived labor movement in the '30s, they reasoned, so too might the fiercely antilabor Reagan-Bush decade foreshadow another labor resurgence. Although the continued decline of labor into the 1990s tempered that expectation, the recent election of John Sweeney as AFL-CIO president has revived it. Sweeney promises to recruit unorganized workers into the union movement and vows to take advantage of every opportunity to reverse corporate dominance of the workplace.

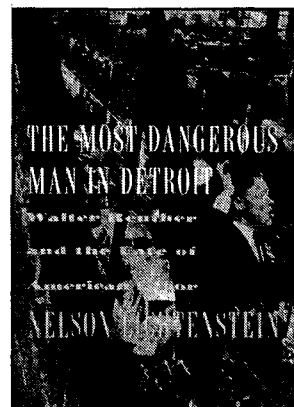
However, there are some—strong labor sympathizers among them—who laud Sweeney's intentions even as they doubt the ability of any one individual to reverse the profound political, economic and social changes Americans have recently experienced. In this respect, Nelson Lichtenstein's important study of Walter Reuther, the longtime president of the United Auto Workers (UAW), offers readers an instructive historical perspective on these expectations.

By any account, Walter Reuther must be considered one of the most dominant personalities of the 20th-century labor movement. Like Samuel Gompers, John L. Lewis, Sidney Hillman and, from a different perspective, even Jimmy Hoffa, Reuther came to define in his person a major orientation within organized labor. His fundamental approach to trade unionism, as Lichtenstein so aptly writes, grew out of a commitment to an American social democracy whose roots were immensely complex: part Debsian socialism, part a fervent belief in American progress and technological efficiency, part a radical vision of democracy on the shop floor. All these elements more or less coalesced, in turn, under Reuther's pragmatic approach to leading a modern bureaucratic institution, which solicited support from the state for programs and policies that many of Reuther's own rank and file could not envision and, perhaps, would not support. However frustrating contemporaries (and later historians) found aspects of these ideas, both in their individual parts and in their less than harmonious commingling, they nonetheless reflected Reuther's profound grounding in American political culture, which was, and remains, steeped

in these fundamentally contradictory impulses.

Reuther was born into a working-class, immigrant family in Wheeling, W.V., in 1907. His father was a strong supporter of Eugene Debs, America's leading socialist figure, and all five children were exposed early to the promise of the socialist message. At age 19, already an experienced toolmaker, Reuther moved to Detroit, where he was soon joined by his two younger brothers, Roy and Victor. Together they began a lifelong involvement with the automobile industry and with the progressive forces in American political life. The Reuther brothers organized their first picket line, to protest Jim Crow laws at Detroit City College, in 1932. Following that year's presidential election, during which they worked hard for Socialist candidate Norman Thomas, Walter and Victor spent almost three years abroad. They spent most of their sojourn as highly valued foreign workers in Gorky, the Soviet Union's "Automobile City." Both brothers were enthralled by the Soviet experiment, and this feeling shaped Walter's attitude toward American Communists as well, at least until 1938.

As Reuther's presence in the UAW grew (by 1938 he held both local and national offices), his politics also evolved. For both factional and policy reasons, he thought it foolish to jettison the numerous and strongly anti-Communist Catholic workers from the union's ranks, and, from 1939 on, Reuther fought the Communist influence in the UAW in the virtually endless rounds of internecine factional disputes that plagued the union. More important for his career—and for the direction of the broader American labor movement—was his emerging understanding of labor's role in modern American life. As Lichtenstein writes, Reuther's appeal to the non-Communist left and to liberals blossomed as they grasped the core of his "overall strategic approach" in the '40s and beyond: an attack on traditional management power in the name of "social and economic efficiency," combined with a broad appeal for public support of liberal political causes—encased in a sustained effort to shift power relations within the broader society by utilizing the mechanisms of the developing regulatory state. For Lichtenstein, this is the core of Reuther's legacy, and the author has grave doubts concerning its value as the foundation of post-1945 labor relations. Reuther encouraged a consumer consciousness over calls for "power, justice and industrial democracy," Lichtenstein writes, with results he finds



The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit: Walter Reuther and the Fate of American Labor
By Nelson Lichtenstein
BasicBooks
575 pp., \$35

deeply disturbing: "The logic of such an approach devalued interunion solidarity and channeled labor's energy into a collective-bargaining straitjacket that restricted the social visions and political strategies once advocated by the laborite left." Reuther was, in this understanding, both an "enthusiastic champion and knowing victim" of the post-war settlement, and Lichtenstein criticizes "Reuther's faith in collective bargaining, even in its heyday," as a "grave miscalculation."

From this vantage point, it's not surprising that Lichtenstein sharply evaluates the approach the UAW followed in negotiations with auto executives in the decades after Reuther's election as president in 1946. For example, the famous "Treaty of Detroit"—the 1950 contract between General Motors and the UAW—was signed amid fanfare promising the elimination of future class tensions in the industry. But the treaty failed on at least two counts: Tensions in the plants between workers and supervisors did not evaporate; and, with shop stewards limited by the union to a narrow contractualism whose goal was industrial order, even minimal concepts of industrial democracy fell victim to the errors of a mistaken and cocky national union leadership.

Not surprisingly, Lichtenstein is also quite critical of Reuther's political activities during the '60s. While Reuther supported the civil rights movement and marched with Martin Luther King Jr. in the famous 1963 March on Washington, Lichtenstein reminds us that Reuther's deeds and motivations were more complicated than that single image might suggest. The working-class boy from Wheeling was, in the final analysis, immensely attracted to the powerful. He served the ends of both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson in tempering movement militants and worked hard on Johnson's behalf to deny representation to the biracial delegation sent by the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party to the 1964 Democratic Convention in Atlantic City. He remained closely allied with LBJ up through his withdrawal from the 1968 presidential primaries, when Reuther dutifully shifted his support to Johnson protégé Hubert Humphrey. By the time Reuther died in a plane crash in 1970, he arguably no longer symbolized the political direction of his union: The majority of his executive board had backed either McCarthy or Kennedy in 1968, while a strong percentage of white union workers in the Detroit area voted for George Wallace in that same election.

The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit is a mine of useful historical detail, reflecting Lichtenstein's exhaustive research in UAW and related archives over a period of 20 years. But the book somehow leaves the reader feeling that the full

Reuther, the man, his ideas and motivations, and the social context he operated in, remains elusive. Lichtenstein's emphasis on Reuther's public life all but erases a sense of the man himself—although, in part, this may reflect Reuther's self-understanding, what earlier biographers Irving Howe and B.J. Widick called Reuther's "unfinished personality." But more important, given both Lichtenstein's historical perspective and contemporary message, is the persistent critique of Reuther's intentions and decisions.



Two elements in particular seem missing from Lichtenstein's fundamental critique of "Reutherism." First, he doesn't address the reasons *why* labor's alliance with the state looked as good as it did to Reuther and many other labor leaders into the early '70s. That relationship may have produced a series of unforeseen consequences, but, given the historical opposition of employers to unionism, labor eagerly, and perhaps justifiably, welcomed the intercession of a now-supportive state. In addition, any union leader's capacity to maneuver on the national stage was highly circumscribed by the bureaucratic and corporate transformation of America long before Reuther and the UAW rose to prominence. Two recently published studies of the labor movement in this era, Melvyn Dubofsky's *State and Labor in Modern America* and Robert Zieger's *The CIO*, make this point quite well.

Second, Lichtenstein gives little consideration to the union's rank-and-file membership. To be sure, individual union members crop up at numerous points in Lichtenstein's narrative, but the book never fully engages the argument (again suggested by Zieger's *The CIO*) that, beyond the militancy of the CIO's leadership, many CIO workers during and after the '30s were rather uninvolved with their unions, exhibited precious little sympathy with the left, and actually wanted the consumer-driven, orderly contractualism that Lichtenstein so punishes Reuther for advocating. One does not have to agree with such conclusions, but some effort to reckon with them seems essential to an evaluation of Reuther and his era.

But despite such critical omissions, *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit* remains an important book, one that will long enliven debate and discussion on the past and future of the American labor movement. Indeed, it is precisely because the book takes up questions of such urgent historical and political interest that it seems unnecessarily narrow at the very juncture where biography and history might have illuminated a far broader landscape.

Nick Salvatore is the author, most recently, of *We All Got History: The Memory Books of Amos Webber* (Times Books). He teaches at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations.

After virtual

By Anore Horton and Felicia Kornbluh

At a moment when the most prominent voices in the gay rights movement are those of elite conservatives, Urvashi Vaid offers a trenchant critique of mainstream strategies and calls for dramatically broadening the movement's vision. The great contribution of *Virtual Equality* is its clear treatment of the paradox of the contemporary gay movement: the coexistence of cultural strength with political weakness, even in the Clinton era.

Vaid served as executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) from 1989 to 1992, capping off 15 years of work at all levels of the lesbian and gay rights movement. At NGLTF, Vaid stood out, and got a lot of flak, for her interest in forming coalitions with groups working on issues that were not easily understood as "gay rights." Specifically, she worked to build coalitions with the women's movement (on reproductive choice), the civil rights community (on hate crimes and shoring up civil rights laws) and the left (on national health insurance).

Vaid explains *Virtual Equality* as a response to two disturbing developments. One is the prominence of gay male conservative writers like *New Republic* editor Andrew Sullivan and *New Criterion* contributor Bruce Bawer. Sullivan's *Virtually Normal* and Bawer's *A Place at the Table* both argue that gay and lesbian demands should be restricted to such formal acknowledgments of equality as gay marriage, leaving most of the rest of gay experience—and homophobia—closeted in the private sphere. Such conservative critics deride "misfits" within the gay community—drag queens, butch lesbians, twentysomething direct-action politicians—and downplay the origins of the gay and lesbian movement in the "misfit" politics of feminism, gay liberation, black civil rights and black power.

The second disturbing development Vaid cites is the emergence of the Clinton administration as an unstable ally for gay men and lesbians. She points out that although gays reportedly delivered more than \$3 million to the 1992 Democratic campaign, and Clinton's rhetoric was friendlier to lesbians and gays than that of any presidential candidate in history, Clinton has not noticeably changed the legal or social status of gay people. To Vaid, lesbian and gay visibility in Clinton's Washington has been merely "virtual equality," which gay leaders have mistakenly

accepted for the real thing.

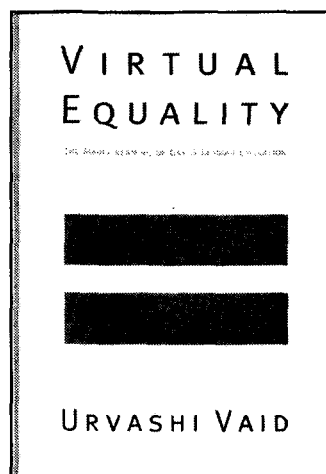
Vaid takes the outcome of the debate over gays in the military as the epitome of such "virtual equality." Despite bold promises to end the seemingly unassailable antigay policies of the U.S. armed forces, Clinton retreated to the "Don't ask, don't tell" position as soon as he encountered political pressure. The movement's failure to force Clinton to take a stand makes Vaid eager for a new kind of gay and lesbian politics.

The current strategy of the movement is something Vaid calls "mainstreaming": seeking access through money and elite contacts, all trained on the ultimate goal of integration into the status quo. And she holds this strategy at least partly responsible for "Don't ask, don't tell," and the recent success of more than three dozen "affirmatively antigay" ballot measures in the states. This legislation aims to prohibit gay marriage, prevent adoptions and foster care arrangements by gay parents, and deny gay men and lesbians protection against housing and employment discrimination.

While mainstreaming has always been the goal of some within the movement, Vaid identifies an equally powerful historical alternative—that of gay "liberation." She defines liberation as an ideology that has "social transformation as its goal and community organizing as its method." She calls on gay and lesbian people to tap into this tradition in order to "negotiate a common movement for social justice" with feminists, race-conscious activists and everyone in the United States who cares about economic fairness.

Vaid argues that the AIDS crisis has tipped the balance in lesbian and gay politics from liberation to mainstreaming. AIDS brought to the forefront of the movement white gay men, many of whom had not previously participated in gay politics. They brought money and energy to the movement, but they also brought their ignorance of its liberationist and feminist past. They fought for improved AIDS services, but were hesitant to challenge structural inequities head-on. Vaid suggests that if lesbians, people of color and low-income queers had been in charge, for-profit health care, state welfare and the transformation of the social attitudes that allowed AIDS to be ignored for so long might have been more consistently defined as "gay issues."

Unfortunately, Vaid's criticisms are stronger than her remedies. Although she accurately identifies components



Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation
By Urvashi Vaid
Doubleday
440 pp., \$24.95

of a liberationist ideology, she fails to incorporate this ideology into her program for the lesbian and gay movement. Such omissions particularly color Vaid's treatment of the questions of feminism, gay identity and strategy in the gay rights movement.

Vaid does gay and lesbian activists a service by reminding them of the feminist roots of much of their political agenda. However, her program falls considerably short of feminist ideals. On issues of gender and family, for example, Vaid offers a biting critique of "mainstreaming," bemoaning the fact that "the feminist critique of family and gender roles ... has turned into our wholesale reproduction of family in gay and lesbian drag," while at the same time placing gay marriage on her short list of the six priorities for the contemporary gay movement.

In addition, Vaid makes a welcome call for a "political movement centered on sexuality" that would encompass frank discussion of lesbian and gay sexual practices. She tips her hat to feminist condemnations of sexual violence and power inequality in the bedroom by quoting Suzanne Pharr's credo of ethical sexual behavior: "Is there use of power and violence and control to violate the integrity, autonomy and wholeness of another person? If so, then we know we oppose that behavior."

Unfortunately, she does not seem willing to accept the political consequences of taking her own advice—namely, provoking dissent within the gay and lesbian community. *Virtual Equality* ends with nary a mention of sexual practices Vaid might find unacceptable, or strategies for helping gay men and lesbians to think through their sexual ethics.

Vaid's ambivalence about feminism also emerges in her discussions of health care and AIDS. She offers an insightful analysis of how the AIDS crisis has realigned the gay and lesbian movement, underlining, for example, differences between the comprehensive feminist health agenda and the narrower, service-delivery approach adopted by AIDS organizations. This narrow approach, and the exclusive focus of many AIDS groups on HIV-positive men, led many lesbians to question the relevance of the movement to their needs. Strangely, instead of sympathizing with such concerns, Vaid responds with a lecture about what she calls "[t]he unchallenged antimale assumptions of some lesbians.":

"Invariably a lesbian journalist or conference participant will ask whether I think men would do for lesbians what women have done for men in a crisis comparable to AIDS. This cash-exchange mentality among lesbians makes me angry, because it presumes that the sole reason lesbians get involved in AIDS issues is political or genetic [instead of because of their personal attachments to gay men]."

Here again, Vaid's feminism falters. Without negating the feelings of loss that lesbians experience for their fallen comrades, it seems legitimate to demand equal attention from gay men to predominantly lesbian issues within the movement, such as divorce, child custody, poverty and the problem of sexism. When lesbians do participate in the AIDS movement, it is equally legitimate for us to do so for explic-

itly "political" reasons.

The unevenness of Vaid's feminism stems in part from her ambivalence about gay identity and its place in organizing a social movement. On the one hand, Vaid bravely questions the idea of a biologically, or even socially, derived universal gay identity:

"A false assumption underlies all gay and lesbian organizing: that there is something at once singular and universal that can be called gay or lesbian or bisexual or even transgendered identity. ... The notion that we constitute one community and can coalesce into a unified movement is both a fiction and a prayer."

Yet by the end of the book Vaid backtracks away from the implications of this critique, again resorting to universal categories such as "gay culture," "gay and lesbian character" and "gay morality." It seems that, despite her occasional efforts to resist universalizing gay traits, at heart Vaid believes in a single gay identity. She suggests that people who experience same-sex desire perceive (or *ought* to perceive) this gay identity as their primary one, regardless of whether they have other competing identities—as women, African-Americans, Latina/os, socialists, etc. Thus, she comments that AIDS politics allowed lesbian activists "to come home into *their own movement*" (*italics ours*), without acknowledging that many lesbians have legitimately felt more at home in feminist and civil rights movements than in the gay movement. Despite her description of gay unity as a "fiction and a prayer," at times Vaid assumes that while lesbians and gay men ally with each other naturally, they ally with other progressives only in more distant—and expedient—coalitions.

Vaid is similarly inconsistent in her discussions of strategies. Despite her initial advocacy of "liberation" as opposed to "mainstreaming," Vaid argues by her final chapter that "the question cannot be resolved one way or the other." Ultimately, Vaid's failure to choose between liberation and mainstreaming leads her to propose a core agenda for the movement that is actually little more than the civil rights advocacy already occupying most of the movement's energy—with some coalition-building on the side.

Vaid offers an equally dispiriting endorsement of status quo gay and lesbian politics when she takes up the question of leadership. As part of her critique of mainstreaming, she pays lip service to the significance of community-based organizing (as opposed to elite lobbying). But she is overly critical of the most successful grass-roots gay political groups, like ACT UP and Queer Nation. She calls the media attention these groups thrive on "false leadership—unaccountable, ego-driven and antithetical to the voice of more credible, less polarizing ... leaders."

However, if accountability means that leaders make decisions in consultation with their constituents, Vaid seems less concerned with the accountability of Washington-based national organizations than she is with grass-roots ones. In

Continued on page 36

The continuing significance of race

By Jane Goldman and Miranda Joseph

The funny thing is, given the way she's been singled out for scorn, Patricia Williams isn't all that subversive. She is, however, perceptive, original and smart; what's more, she helped found the movement in law scholarship called critical race theory, and to its detractors, critical race theory is scary.

Like its progenitors—critical legal theory, the law school version of post-structuralism, and feminist theory, which has aimed to reveal the political in the personal—critical race theory seeks to examine the assumptions that underlie the law in America. And so Williams recently drew the ire of the *Wall Street Journal's* peevish op-ed pages in an essay called "Law School Humbug" by Heather MacDonald. The piece, excerpted from a longer article published in *City Journal*, the house organ of the conservative think tank the Manhattan Institute, decried the ascendancy of critical race theory and feminist jurisprudence in law schools. MacDonald claimed these movements represent a "dangerous flight from reason and logic in favor of emotion and group solidarity." She characterized Williams and other critical race scholars as philistines who sacrifice hard social truths for wishful thinking, and who dismiss law as "just a 'story' told by white males." MacDonald charges Williams and her colleagues with that gravest of offenses, a breach of objectivity: Having "dispensed with the conventions of legal scholarship—case analysis, statement of a legal problem followed by suggestions for its resolution," critical race acolytes are free to wallow in subjectivity, retailing "personal anecdotes telling of an author's oppression."

The irony here is that Williams, who teaches law at Columbia University, is, for all her criticisms of conventional legal scholarship, a staunch defender of the possibility of objectivity who fervently believes in the hope of discovering truth. Recasting discussions about race in more truthful terms is the aim of her new book, *The Rooster's Egg*.

Williams' previous book, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*, was an "autobiographical essay," an innovative form in which she used stories of her life as jumping-off points to analyze and critique law and legal theory. The essays in *The Rooster's Egg* (most of which have been previously published in law journals and magazines such as *The Nation* and

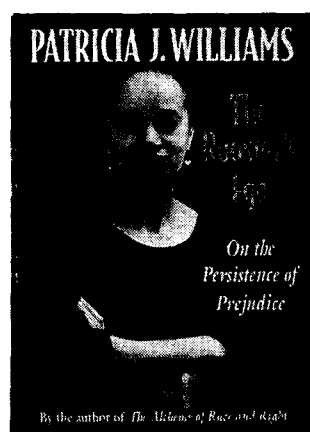
The Village Voice) are less obviously of a piece. Addressing contemporary topics such as affirmative action, welfare reform, Lani Guinier, Hillary Clinton, and radio and television talk shows, they focus, overall, on media portrayals of race and the way those stereotypes straitjacket thought.

The essays mix personal anecdote with cultural criticism to sketch a picture of how things are and to lay the foundation for her suggestions for change. Despite her "reputation as a radical theorist," to which she mockingly refers in one of the pieces collected here, she winds up supporting some old-fashioned liberal positions, including a rights-based approach to the amelioration of racism and sexism.

In a sharp, funny chapter on affirmative action, "White Men Can't Count," Williams notes that during her first year at Harvard Law School (1972-73, when Allan Bakke was filing his reverse discrimination suit against the University of California at Davis Medical School), newspapers made much of Harvard's policy of keeping separate tiers of admissions thresholds for black and white applicants. But media reports didn't mention Harvard's affirmative action for the wealthy. "Harvard's admissions process had lots of tiers," Williams writes, "such as the one for children of alumni, who were admitted at rates grossly, even obscenely, disproportionate to their 'scored' worth."

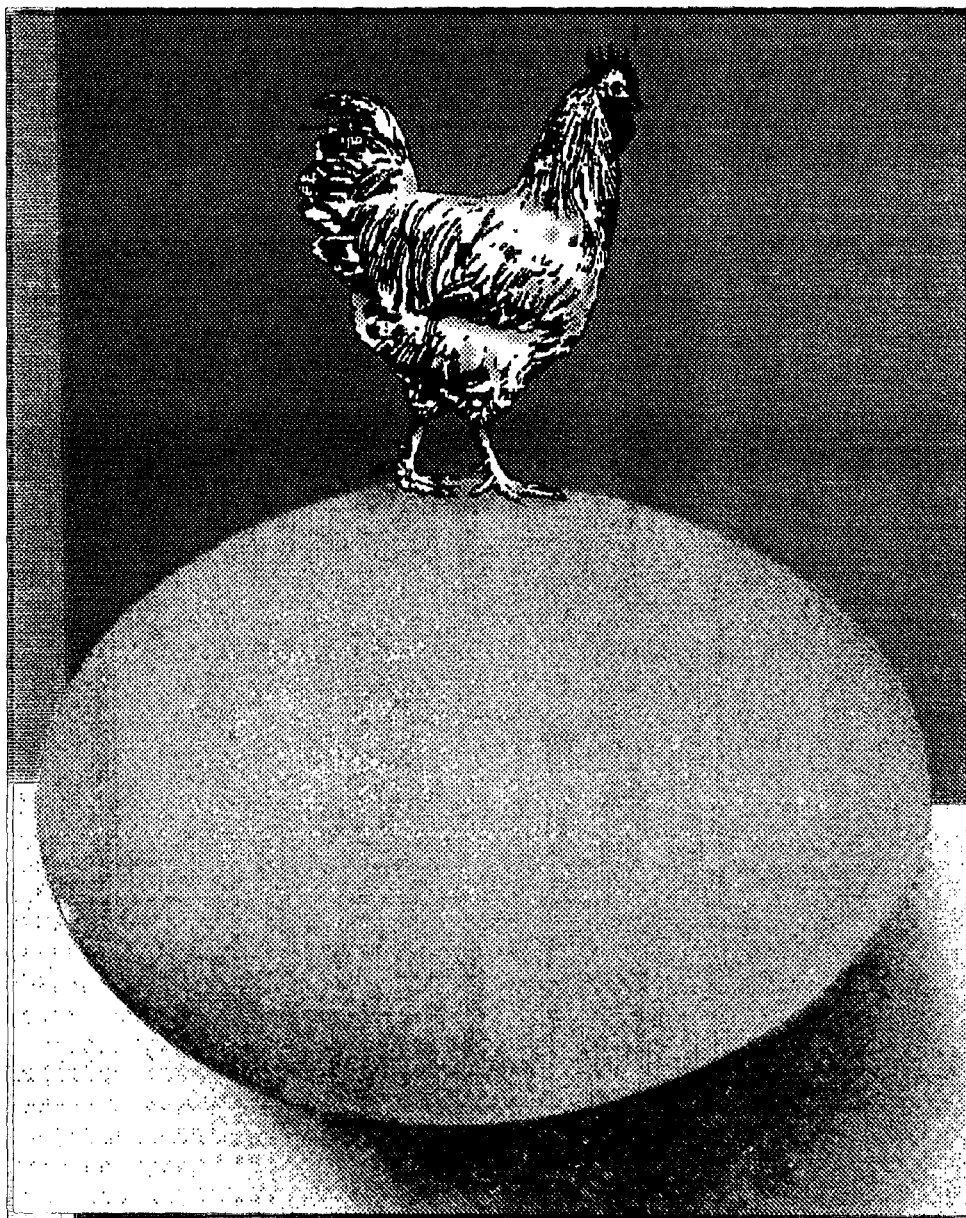
In another essay, "Unbirthing the Nation," Williams explains the story-telling approach that so angers critics. By telling anecdotes, she breaks down assumed categories; and by referring specifically to individuals stigmatized by social and political stereotypes, she breaks down stereotypes and generalizations. She describes how broad categories can erase rather than clarify the lives they claim to describe—especially the lives of the oppressed and disenfranchised. For example, the term "underclass," Williams writes, "is a way of unnam-ing the poor, while 'whiteness' is a way of not naming ethnicity." She tells a story about a little girl who became alarmed when one of her friends defied urban social codes by addressing a man on the street ("Mommy, she called a homeless man a name!"). "The very simplest of social exchanges," Williams comments, "struck this little girl as something like a blasphemous epithet against the safe borders of what exists, of what *can* be known and named."

This sort of disinformation, in Williams' view, contorts our racial debates. In "Unbirthing the Nation," Williams describes how these media images produce a sort of collective cognitive dissonance:



**The Rooster's Egg:
On the Persistence
of Prejudice**

By Patricia J. Williams
Harvard University Press
262 pp., \$22



Slyly contemptuous images of lower-class whites claim classlessness but ooze condescension; their targets feel victimized by a “liberal” media. But blacks, victimized by parallel media portrayals of them as lazy, violent and amoral, blame “conservative” media bias. Meanwhile, the cultural contributions of distinct, marginal groups become assimilated or appropriated by the dominant culture, and the status quo is “naturalized.”

To help replace mythology with reality, she suggests allowing more complicated representations of experience. “The irreducibility of the category of ‘black’ in racist imagination must be whittled away by persistently detailed descriptions of lived encounters,” she says, and goes on to relate a story about going to a hip-hop dance class and finding herself in a room full of Japanese students who did the hip-hop thing a lot better than she did. In the class, she says, “I certainly expected to feel old. What I had not expected

was to feel both so *black* and so *white*.”

Another solution she suggests is the dispersion of ownership in the rapidly conglomerating media marketplace. Owning the tools of mass communication allows one to “propagate oneself in the marketplace of cultural images”—that is, to make up your own, more truthful, self-portrayals.

Yet Williams’ persistent stress on the apprehension of individuals as individual doesn’t prevent her from endorsing a politics of group interest as well. She sees a place for identity politics, recognizing that the “race-blind” individualism supported by conservative critics misses the forest for the trees. She notes, for example, how the law’s approach to civil liberties as issues of private contract law ignores ways in which these cases add up. After the 100th case in which a black man loses a lawsuit to a white opponent, more than just the individual merits of the case would seem to be at play. In the court’s “contractarian” vision, Williams notes, public issues become private contracts, a sense of public good is lost and the enforcement of civil rights gets recast as interference with individual autonomy.

Williams also acknowledges growing ambivalence about the limits of identity politics, but suggests such limitations, once critically scrutinized, need not degenerate into crude categorizations based on group identity. “Although we can be grouped according to our similarities,” she writes, “difference and similarity are not exclusive categories, but are instead continually evolving. Equal opportunity is not only about assuming the circumstances of hypothetically indistinguishable individuals, but also about accommodating the living, shifting fortunes of those who are very differently situated.”

The big hurdle these days, of course, is that the dominant culture no longer wants to talk about any of this, or even believe that problems of racism and sexism exist. In this view of things, racism is kept alive only by those who harp about it—and (white) people are losing their patience and understandably turning against the whiners. Any discussion of the problem is, in fact, the problem itself. What’s more, in one of the most maddening developments in contemporary

political debate, words get turned upside down, and issues get shoved into heads-I-win-tails-you-lose forums.

Williams delineates this process in an essay called "Pansy Quits." We have witnessed, she argues, the "transformation of the rationales for enslavement or oppression from one discourse to another"—"the debate of equality has shifted to one about free speech; legal discussions involving housing, employment and schooling have shifted from the domain of civil rights to that of the market and thus have become 'ungovernable,' mere consumption preference."

Williams remains confident that the power of rational truth-telling, of the sort she has incorporated into her critiques of law and politics, will be able to counter effectively, if not actually dissolve, the powerful discursive forces that lock longstanding structures of oppression in place. It's an oddly liberal faith, not unlike the view advanced by German philosopher Jürgen Habermas that an ideal civic discourse can combat public discourse. And where can such a discourse be found? Williams holds forth the classroom. The media, she argues, is infused with power; the university is largely purged of it and can safely harbor reasoned discussion.

This position certainly underlines that Williams is not the solipsistic liberationist that the *Wall Street Journal* would have her be. But at the same time, the reader can't help suspecting that it leaves something out. Perhaps Williams' work, for all its nuance and insight, lacks a skepticism about the state or, more precisely, the notion that the state-directed solutions Williams endorses might in fact produce the very categories she wants to critique. In other words, maybe it's not just media manipulation that produces the false image of the "welfare queen," but welfare itself that reproduces identities defined by class, race and gender.

Williams' politics hinges on a central proposition: The "dominant gaze"—the powerful's vision of the world—is false and unknowing; the gaze of the oppressed can speak the truth. But as political theorist Wendy Brown has suggested in a recent critique of Williams, perhaps we should forget about which vision is more true and work toward a common political good, becoming comfortable with political power as well as the pain of disempowerment. Paraphrased too simply, Brown's argument—which appears in her own recent book *States of Injury* (Princeton University Press)—is that Williams, in working to shore up rights-based equality and a fair shot at the American Dream, is rearranging pieces inside a box, forgetting that we could and should be redesigning the whole damn box.

But if Williams' implicit liberalism comes up short for radical critics, her overall contribution to contemporary political debate is invaluable. Her insights are complex and compelling. Few today see so clearly, and write so engagingly, about the prejudice that has settled so insidiously into our lives. ◀

Jane Goldman is the former editor of *California Lawyer* magazine. Miranda Joseph is an assistant professor of women's studies at the University of Arizona.

Virtual equality

Continued from page 33

fact, she displays brittleness toward those "followers" who dissent from the policies of their leaders:

"[W]hen gay leaders try to marshal support for marriage or sodomy-law repeal or AIDS policy, they encounter opposition from those who charge that another issue is the more important one. This happened in the military fight. Rather than uniting behind the effort to overturn this form of government discrimination, gay people argued about whether it was the right goal. Our division undermined our leadership and ultimately helped our enemies."

Vaid's persistent reading of opposition from community-based organizers to the policies of Washington-based leaders as a disruption of unity is precisely what leads to the kind of political weaknesses that currently plagues the national gay rights movement. By this point, Vaid has moved far away from the late '60s gay liberation and feminist roots she identifies with in the first half of her book and toward a hierarchical movement structure that her more radical sisters and brothers would never have endorsed.

Vaid offers numerous hints about where the gay movement might go in the future. Much in her critique of the contemporary gay movement, and summary of the movement's history, could lay the groundwork for a genuinely inclusive, progressive lesbian and gay program. But at critical points, such as her discussion of gay identity and sexual practices, Vaid stops short of acknowledging a strong "social constructionist" position. Once the movement takes the position that being gay is at least partly a choice, it will have a foundation that can support the liberationist claim that we should (in Vaid's words) "assimilate the dominant culture to us"—rather than assimilate ourselves to it. Denaturalizing gay identity might compel lesbian and gay leaders to widen their political focus in order to attract gay people whom they now seem to assume should identify with the movement naturally. Such a broadening would make the movement less class- and race-bound, and therefore a more comfortable place for lesbians, progressives and gay men and women of color. Even though the book itself doesn't always make good on this promise, *Virtual Equality* offers a valuable reminder that there are alternatives to the narrowing gay agendas endorsed by Sullivan and Bawer. Expanding our definition of "gay issues," rather than parting company with those who find the contemporary gay movement too narrow, is the way to build a powerful lesbian and gay movement for the future. ◀

Anore Horton is a graduate student in history at Princeton University. Felicia Kornbluh is an associate fellow of the Institute for Policy Studies and a graduate student in history at Princeton University.

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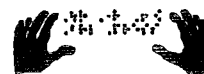
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the suburb where I've lived for my entire life. A couple of times a year, the neighbors get together and eat, a ritual whose rarity emphasizes the separation between us rather than the connection. Genuine, lasting bonds are formed in places outside the home, where neighbors meet on an almost daily basis—taverns, dance halls, the town barber-shop. Chowing on burgers twice a year on someone's patio makes it difficult to create deep connections or even get past small talk. Instead of exploring the pain of lost love or the nature of God—which I've done with complete strangers in a bar—we wade through the usual home improvement banalities: lawns, power tools and, well, lawns. It is talk devoid of local color; as a story in *Newsweek* about ill-advised suburban planning pointed out, you could transplant any suburbanite to a similar development in any other part of the country and he'd never know the difference.

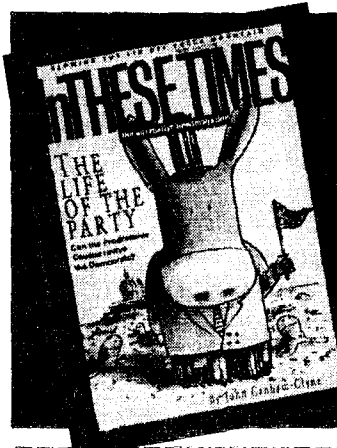
Yet, according to the same *Newsweek* piece, some developers have become interested in a new kind of neighborhood, where geography attempts to reinforce rather than extinguish human contact. One such place is Kentlands, which is in a part of Maryland not too far from my house. Its public squares and mixed-income housing are an antidote to what the architect who designed them, Andres Duany, called the suburban "monoculture"—identical homes inhabited by people with identical incomes and identical interests.

Inspired by Duany's vision, I drove up to the Claggett Farm construction site to see a copy of the master plan, hoping that a like-minded artist was pulling the strings behind the new development. I could see it now—roads that lead not to dead ends but to a central square, like the *omphalos* of ancient Greece, where citizens would come to regenerate the soul of the polis.

When I saw the plan, my fantasies evaporated. The development of Claggett Farms called for the same old insipid suburban layout that goes back to Levittown: pseudo-colonial houses with names like "Chatsworth" and "Hampton," evoking the moneyed, asocial comfort of English country estates; streets dead-ending in cul-de-sacs. No central square or corner shop, no dance hall. Just more traffic and almost 200 homes filled with people I'll never meet.

Seeing the last spots of open land plowed under and the Hamptons and Chatsworths go up, I've decided to move back into the city. I can't lick or join fatuous suburban planning, so I'm leaving it, forsaking the security of single-family luxury homes for the tension of an urban environment. I'm sure the neighbors at the cookout will think I'm crazy when they learn—sometime next summer—that I've forsaken the paradise of even lawns and private pools for the heat and crime and dirt of the city. But 30 years in the suburbs have taught me what most POWs know—hell isn't as much being tortured as marking time in a place where nothing ever happens.

Mark Gauvreau Judge has written for the *Washington Post* and various magazines. For not much longer, he will be living in Potomac, Md.



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Lawns and order

By Mark Gauvreau Judge

For the past few months, construction has been under way in a field across the street from my suburban neighborhood outside Washington, D.C. Every day, workers arrive in bulldozers and dump trucks, turning what was the Clagett Horse Farm into 180 "luxury single-family homes."

As I watch the grazing grass being plowed to dirt and the first frames go up, I keep hoping that along with the houses would come another kind of structure—a corner store or a coffee shop, or maybe a public square where neighbors could walk their dogs and exchange news. A place that I wouldn't need a car to get to.

Such fond longings for a communal spot are inspired by a book called *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You Through the Day* by sociologist Ray Oldenburg (Paragon House, 1989). Oldenburg's premise is that pretty much everything wrong in America can be traced to the elimination of the "third place," areas outside of work and home that were once hubs of civic and social life in the United States. Oldenburg argues that third places, from Japanese tea gardens and English pubs to Main Street U.S.A., are vital on social, psychological, spiritual and political levels. By bringing neighbors face to face on neutral ground, third places level economic disparities, provide a healthy outlet from the pressures of work and home and foster deep emo-

tional connections to a community.

For those of us raised in the suburbs, the idea of the third place is as quaint as the streetcar. Key to such a place is its close proximity to the community—the ability to walk there—and suburban planning seems intended to avoid casual human contact at all costs. "About the only need that suburbanites can satisfy by means of an easy walk," writes Oldenburg, "is that which impels them toward their bathroom." In the suburbs, if we want to be around other people we drive to malls and shopping centers. There we can inhabit hygienic approximations of third places, strategically placed in Barnes & Noble or Borders outlets, where the give and take of public discourse bows to the higher imperatives of well-lit browsing and buying. Indeed, as Oldenburg notes, shopping has become a poor replacement for an active communal life: "Where there are homes without a connection to community, where houses are located in areas devoid of congenial meeting places, the enemy called boredom is ever at the gate. Much money must be spent to compensate for the sterility of the surrounding environment. ... Home decoration and redecoration becomes a never-ending process as people depend upon new wallpaper or furniture arrangements to add zest to their lives. ... A lively round of after-dinner conversation isn't as simple as a walk to the corner pub—one has to host the dinner."

Such dinners are what passes for community in Potomac,

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